

RISE OF THE SIKH POWER

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To
JOSEPH DAVEY CUNNINGHAM
THE CONSCIENTIOUS AND FAITHFUL HISTORIAN
WHOSE HISTORY OF THE SIKHS
FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1849
STILL REMAINS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION

PREFACE

In the following pages an attempt has been made to trace the history of the Sikh struggle for independence in the eighteenth century and Sikh rule in the Punjab before the advent of Ranjit Singh. The subject has been touched on in outlines in Cunningham's brilliant work, and only a few pages have been devoted to it in Latif's History of the Punjab. A very valuable account is to be found in Sarkar's "Fall of the Mughal Empire," Vols. I and II. But significant as the Sikh struggle is in the history of India, we cannot expect a detailed and critical treatment of the subject in all its phases, in a treatise that deals mainly with the steady decline of the central authority. I have tried to illuminate an obscure corner of Indian history, with what success it is for my readers to judge. It has been my endeavour to make an exhaustive study of all the available sources but I had no access to Forster's Despatches to the Governor-General, now in the course of publication.

I am greatly indebted to Mr. Syamaprasad Mookerjee, M.A., B.L., Barrister-at-law, Vice-Chancellor and President, Post-Graduate Council in Arts, but for whose sympathetic interest in my work and unfailing support, it would have been impossible for me to secure transcriptions of rare Persian manuscripts from different parts of India and Europe. Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Kt., placed me under great obligation by permitting me to use his own translation of the unique manuscript—the Delhi Chronicle. My indebtedness to him is indicated more fully in my bibliography. Prof. S. N. Sen, M.A., Ph.D., B.Litt., Asutosh Professor of Mediaeval and Modern Indian History, took a personal interest in my work; he placed his valuable library of Maratha History entirely at my disposal and was always eager to help me out of my difficulties. I also tender my grateful thanks to my old teachers, Dr. H. C. Raychaudhuri, M.A., Ph.D., Carmichael Professor of Ancient Indian History and Culture, Mr. Indubhushan Banerjee, M.A., Lecturer, Calcutta University, and Mr. Tripurari Chakravarty, M.A., Lecturer, Calcutta University, for their valuable suggestions. My friends Prof. S. C. Sengupta, M.A., Ph.D.,

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Rise of the Sikh Power

CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARY

The history of India in the eighteenth century is mainly a record of anarchy and confusion, selfishness, cowardice and treachery, unpatriotic betrayals and horrible reigns of terror, the tyranny of the strong, the agony of the weak and the futility of isolated attempts. The depth of this gloom is, however, relieved by the story of the rise of Sikh political power, as a result of the collective endeavour of a united people.

Guru Gobind Singh first made the Sikhs a militant nation. He inspired the proverbial rabbit to turn round and put to rout the pursuing pack of hounds. It would have been quite natural if the Guru had attributed his own success to his military and organising genius. A military leader is apt to demand unquestioning obedience, and we would

not have been surprised if the Guru had provided for a military dictatorship in view of the stupendous struggle which awaited his disciples in the near future. But he left the care of his flock as well as his army not to a single person but to the whole community. He placed his faith in the collective wisdom of the community and not in the devotion of a favourite disciple.

To the discerning student of Indian history, the Maratha and Sikh struggles for independence must appear remarkable, not so much for the decisive character of the campaigns as for the successful leadership of comparatively obscure men. When Sivaji died and his country was overrun by the Muslim armies under the personal leadership of Aurangzeb himself, the infant Maratha power appeared to be doomed to a premature end. But the nation was led from victory to victory under the guidance of comparatively inexperienced men like Raja Ram, Prahlad Niraji, Shantaji Ghorpade, Khanderao Dhabade and others. Similarly when Guru Gobind Singh passed away and Banda's heroic efforts ended in unmitigated disasters, Sikhism did not suffer extinction but found fresh leaders and new recruits. This crisis in the

history of the nation brought to the forefront even obscure men like Kapur Singh and Jassa Singh Kalal. They stepped into the breach and won success for the Sikh cause. There is thus a striking similarity between the Sikh and the Maratha struggle for independence. A war is to be judged by its results and not by its episodes. In the Sikh annals of this period, we do not read of great battles or prolonged sieges, brilliant strategy or novel tactics. A nation was up in arms against its enemies and it is the collective efforts of the masses rather than individual achievements that ultimately made the revolution a success. Naturally enough, the story of these years of revolution "is a story of great things and small ; but, when all is said, the great predominate, for no blunder could efface the readiness for self-sacrifice displayed by the whole people."

It is the peculiar tragedy of Sikh history that the very success of this collective struggle had in it the germs of its failure. The "theocratic confederate feudalism" succeeded where a centralized monarchy would have failed. But in its very success were concealed the germs of dissolution. What might have been the most novel experiment

in statecraft degenerated later, in the nineteenth century, into a military monarchy, a type of government with which we are only too familiar in history and which, though it dazzles by early success, spells ultimate failure. . . .

CHAPTER II

MUGHAL DISINTEGRATION—THE AFGHAN MENACE 1716-'52

The fortunes of the Sikh nation sank to the lowest ebb in 1716. Abdus Samad Khan, a Turani nobleman reputed to be a good general, had been placed by Farruksiyar, the Mughal Emperor, in command against the Sikhs. As a Persian chronicler records in his characteristic metaphorical language—"he filled that extensive plain with blood as if it had been a dish."¹ After the imprisonment, torture and death of Banda and his followers, the emperor's orders proclaiming a general round-up of the Sikhs were successfully carried out. Many of the followers of Guru Gobind Singh were arrested and on their refusal to become Muhammadans were put to death. A reward was given for every Sikh head. The Sikhs either fled to the mountains or cut off their beard and renounced their religion.² The policy of

¹ Muntakhabu-l-lubab, Elliot VIII.

² Forster, Travels, Letter XI.

persecution so relentlessly followed by him was almost successful. The Sikhs kept quiet. The triumph of his ruthless policy earned Abdus Samad Khan the title "Sword of the State." In spite of the commotion in Delhi, the vigorous campaign initiated by him continued unabated. This Alva of the Sikh war of independence died in 1737 in Multan.

Zakariya Khan, the eldest son of Abdus Samad Khan, had already succeeded his father as the Governor of Lahore in 1726, and not long after his father's death, he was also given the charge of Multan.³ He was an active soldier and an excellent administrator. If circumstances had been favourable, he might have established an independent Muslim monarchy in the Punjab, as other governors, more favourably placed, did in Bengal, Oudh and the Deccan. If he could not do so, it was largely because of foreign aggression. He made a very good beginning. We have it on very reliable evidence that there was uninterrupted commercial intercourse between Kabul and Lahore and Lahore and Delhi. He had always 20,000 sowars ready.⁴

³ Anand Ram Mukhlis, *Tazkirah*, p. 94, Elliot, VIII.

⁴ *Hakikat*, p. 19.

Zakariya Khan followed a dual policy of firmness and kindness. The Sikh freebooters were relentlessly pursued and slain ; yet at the same time, their ravages were sought to be repaired. Towns and villages were repopulated. If law and order were vindicated, if people could settle down to the arts of peace, the Sikhs would be regarded as undesirables ; but if the land remained out of cultivation and the people stood in constant dread of life and property, a very considerable section of them would rather prefer joining the robbers to being robbed by them. The twofold policy, for a time, seemed to be crowned with success.

But the Sikhs would now and then create disturbance, plunder caravans and loot the royal *Khazana* and then would fly to the hills or to the forests. These forests, like the *Lakhi-Jangal*, were so thick that the horses of the Mughal pursuers could not penetrate into them. But the Sikhs who had settled there would move as freely as the deer.⁵ At the same time, Bhai Mani Singh and others were steadily making large numbers of converts.⁶ One of the most important events that

⁵ Panth Prakash, pp. 446, 449.

⁶ Umdat-ut-Tawarikh, I, p. 108.

took place in 1738, was the martyrdom of Mani Singh. With the permission of the Subahdar, on condition of a payment of Rs. 5,000, to the royal exchequer, he made arrangements for a fair at Amritsar. But the Governor had planned to attack the Sikhs when they assembled at the fair. The Sikhs, however, were much too shrewd to fall into this trap and they fled away. Thereupon, Mani Singh for nonpayment of the stipulated sum was arraigned before the Subahdar, who ordered that his limbs should be torn from his body.⁷ This martyrdom of Mani Singh supplied the much needed fillip to the Sikh struggle for independence.

Gradually, the disorganized Sikhs were finding the right men to lead them, and faced with the grave danger of utter extinction they began to plan organised resistance. In times of great national danger, a democracy shows a sound instinct in selecting the right man to lead it through the crisis. Kapur Singh, a resident of Fyzullapur, who like Epaminondas of Thebes, took pleasure in serving the people even in the humblest capacity, cooking for them, washing their dishes, fanning

7. Panth Prakash, pp. 530-35.

them when assembled, was once in May, 1733, hailed as the leader and welcomed with the title of Nawab.⁸ He was henceforth universally obeyed and he started organizing what developed later into the celebrated *Dal Khalsa* or the army of the theocracy of the Singhs.⁹

Zakariya Khan had other difficulties to contend with, the most conspicuous of these being the factious jealousy and foolish distrust of the party in power in Delhi. Himself a pillar of the Turani party, he was looked down upon by the Hindustani party that poisoned the Emperor's

⁸ According to Panth Prakash, in 1733, an attempt was made by Zakariya Khan to conciliate the Sikhs. He is said to have persuaded the Delhi Government to grant them a Jagir and the title of Nawab was to be given to the leader of the Sikhs. The offer was at first treated with scorn. Ultimately, however, they agreed to accept the offer of a Jagir but the title and robes of honour were tossed from one man to another until Kapur Singh Fyzullapuria, who was fanning the assembled host, agreed to be invested with the robes and title. Thus he came to be known as Nawab Kapur Singh. The Jagir was confiscated in 1735.

⁹ Panth Prakash, pp. 500-505. The army was divided into two groups, the elder, called Budha Dal, the younger Taruna Dal; the younger group was subdivided into five Jathas, (1) commanded by Dip Singh and Sudha Singh, (2) commanded by Karm Singh and Dharm Singh, (3) com-

ears.¹⁰ Though distrusted by the monarch and many of the Court people, the strong satrap of the Punjab still continued his drive. The Sikhs had retired to the mountains and from there carried on a predatory war in the skirts of the mountains, "as if to try the temper of the government." " In these dark days they were, as Cunningham puts it, kept together only by the fervour of their belief.

While Khan Bahadur Zakariya Khan was thus preoccupied and the supine courtiers in Delhi were passing their days in intrigues, a storm burst upon the country. Nadir Shah invaded India.

We are not concerned here with the details of Nadir's career of conquest in India. But the Persian invasion is a very important event in

manded by Kan Singh and Binode Singh, (4) commanded by Dasuandha Singh, (5) consisted of Majhabhi Sikhs under Madan Singh and Bir Singh. The Budha Dal was placed under the following:—Shyam Singh, Gurbaksh Singh of Royanwal, Gurbaksh Singh of Jita, Bhag Singh, Gurdyal Singh, Kubar Singh, Bhumiya Singh and Jassa Singh Kalal—Jassa Singh was also Nawab Kapur Singh's Secretary. We are reminded of the early Roman military organization in which the soldiers, organized in groups of centuries, were further subdivided according to age as *Seniorum* and *Juniorum*.

¹⁰ Irvine, *Later Mughals*, II, pp. 325-26.

¹¹ Browne, *India Tracts*.

the history of the rise of the Sikh power. In the first place, it enfeebled the strong government of Zakariya Khan. The commotion and the confusion were very favourable to the rise of the Sikhs. On the approach of the invader, many people of the Punjab fled to the hills with their movable property. The Sikhs plundered them with impunity. Thus many Sikh Sardars passed at once from poverty to affluence. Some of those who fled to the mountains joined the ranks of the Sikhs, who had become a great terror, and to join their ranks would mean not merely immunity from plunder but also affluence and eminence. Those who under pressure from Zakariya Khan had abjured the religion of Guru Gobind Singh, were readmitted.¹² They came out of their obscurity and wherever they could find that the officers of the Khan Bahadur were weak, they began to plunder.¹³ These depredations, at first petty, became gradually bolder and bolder as the Sikhs understood that they could carry on their operations with perfect immunity. It is said that

¹² Browne, *India Tracts*, p. 13.
Khalsanama, p. 19.

¹³ Hakikat, p. 19.

Nadir's army, encumbered with spoil, was plundered in the rear by the Sikhs,¹⁴ when making its march to Persia. The great Persian conqueror could have had nothing but contempt for the Indian soldiery. He perhaps thought that the terror of his name would be sufficient to protect his baggages. It is said that, on being informed that his baggages had been plundered by the Sikhs, he asked Zakariya Khan, who was in attendance, about their whereabouts. He was told that the houses of the Sikhs were their saddles,¹⁵ meaning thereby that it was very difficult to get at them. Thus Nadir's invasion saw the Sikhs increase considerably their reputation as dare-devil soldiers, at the same time that they enriched themselves. In these circumstances, it was not to be expected that they would be overawed any more by the dishonoured and discredited Mughal authority. The suppression of the Sikhs, difficult under all circumstances, became even more difficult now.

The Sikhs organized themselves near a village called Dalewal on the Ravi and built a fort there. From this place they made their ravages

¹⁴ Malcolm, Sketch, p. 86.

¹⁵ Panth Prakash, pp. 559-61.

and plundered the country around.¹⁶ They extended their depredations up to the very neighbourhood of Lahore. Khan Bahadur Zakariya Khan was confirmed in the Nizamat of Lahore by Nadir Shah.¹⁷ No sooner did the Sikhs see his power restored, than they withdrew from Lahore and its neighbourhood and transferred the field of their activity to the Jalandhar Doab. After the retirement of Nadir Shah, Khan Bahadur Zakariya Khan placed Adina Beg Khan in charge of the Jalandhar Doab with orders to bring the Sikhs to subjection.

This Adina Beg Khan was destined to play a prominent part in the Sikh struggle for independence. He was the son of Channu, an Aiam of Sharakpur, Tahsil Lahore. In Allahabad he acquired a knowledge of revenue matters and after his return to the Punjab, he began his career as a contractor. He was put in charge of Sultanpur by Zakariya Khan, at the time of the invasion of Nadir Shah.¹⁸ Entrusted with the task of chastising the Sikhs, this very shrewd man only

¹⁶ Khalsanama, p. 19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Ahwal-i Adina Beg Khan, p. 1.

partly carried out his work in the Jalandhar Doab region and was not inclined to attempt a complete subjugation of the Sikhs, which he thought, would undermine his influence and power. If only he had been willing, he could have done much, but he preferred to enter into a secret understanding with them.¹² Though he pretended to be very serious, he allowed the Sikhs to continue their depredations and thus managed to keep up his importance.¹³

Even though all these elements were fostering a state of chaos and anarchy, the Trans-Sutlej Sikhs had yet to reckon with a strong and vigilant governor in Zakariya Khan until his death in 1745. But in the Cis-Sutlej region under the Delhi Subah, the utter weakness of the Government gave the Sikhs a much freer hand to carry on their plundering raids.

district in foreign hands, the Punjab became a starting point for the expeditions against Delhi.”²¹ The Sikhs and the Mughal viceroys were not left to fight it out among themselves. Ahmad Shah Abdali took up the work begun by Nadir Shah. The pressure of the foreign enemy was now more persistent, for Ahmad Shah Abdali was a much closer neighbour of India than Nadir Shah. Ahmad Shah Abdali and his descendants stand in the same relation to Nadir Shah, as did the Bactrian Greeks to Alexander the Great in the early Hindu period of Indian history. Ahmad Shah's invasions are more intimately a part of the history of India than that of Nadir Shah just as the invasions of Demetrios or Menander influenced Indian history much more deeply than the one spectacular incursion of Alexander.

Zakariya Khan died in 1745. He had three sons—Yahya, Hayatullah Khan and Mir Baqi. The Court intrigues were responsible for the postponement of the appointment of governors. Then the wazir Qamaruddin Khan was made the absentee

²¹ Irvine, *Later Mughals*, II, p. 377.

governor. At last the Emperor agreed to appoint Yahya Khan as the Deputy Governor with the Wazir as the titular Subahdar.²² The Sikhs, ever on the alert to take advantage of the slightest signs of weakness, utilised this uncertainty to push their depredations further and further. After Yahya Khan had taken up the reins of government, he endeavoured to crush the Sikhs. In a collision with them Jaspat Rai, brother of his minister Lakhpat Rai was killed. Lakhpat Rai, however, succeeded in defeating and imprisoning many of the Sikhs. Many Sikhs were killed near Shahidganj. The chief martyr was Bhai Taru Singh, one of the most respected Sikh religious leaders.²³ Yahya Khan issued an order for a general massacre of the Sikhs, a reward being offered for every Sikh head. But very

²² Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, I, pp. 192-93.

²³ Panth Prakash, pp. 577, 582, 687. The judgment delivered by justices Currie and Monroe in the Shahidganj Gurdwara Case, Oct., 1934: "The place commemorates Bhai Taru Singh, who with other Sikhs was executed by the Mahomedan Governor of Lahore in 1746. He was considered a martyr and hence the name Shahidganj." According to Panth Prakash the martyrdom of Taru Singh must be placed in 1745.

soon quarrel began between Yahya Khan and Shahnawaz Khan (Hyatullah). Whenever Yahya Khan sent troops against the Sikhs, Shahnawaz not only sent previous information to the Sikhs through his emissaries but also tried to seduce the troops of Yahya. Thus Shahnawaz secretly helped the Sikhs and at times even openly encouraged them just to frustrate the schemes of his brother.²⁴ In the fratricidal struggle, Shahnawaz got the better of Yahya Khan, put him under surveillance and established himself in his place. Yahya Khan escaped and fled to Delhi to put his case before Muhammad Shah, the reigning monarch and Qamaruddin Khan, the wazir, who was his uncle and father-in-law. This fratricidal struggle gave the Sikhs a breathing space which they so badly needed.

In the meantime very important events were happening in Persia and Afghanistan. Nadir Shah was assassinated in 1747 and Ahmad Khan the Afghan established himself as the independent ruler of Afghanistan. Nadir Shah had prophesied that on his demise, sovereignty would go to Ahmad, that he had never seen an equal of Ahmad in Iran,

²⁴ Hakikat, p. 20.

Turan and Hindustan.²⁵ On assuming sovereign powers, Ahmad Shah struck coins with the inscription—"Ahmad Shah received an order from the Unlike Powerful One to strike coins in silver and gold from the fish to the moon."²⁶ Ahmad Shah had accompanied Nadir Shah to Hindustan. He had seen with his own eyes "The weakness of the empire, the imbecility of the Emperor, the inattention of the ministers, the spirit of independence which had crept among the grandees."²⁷ Now, after having conquered Qandahar, Kabul, Peshawar, he had a very convenient starting point "the manpower of Afghanistan behind him, the Khyber Afghans friendly and obedient and no serious physical obstacle." The Punjab, being now the westernmost Mughal province, had to bear the brunt of the Afghan attack. The repeated Abdali inroads between 1748-67 now exercised a very decisive influence in the history of the rise of the Sikh power.

²⁵ Husain Shahi, p. 50.

²⁶ J.A.S.B., Vol. 54, Part I; C. J. Rodgers, the Coins of Ahmad Shah Abdali.

²⁷ Siyar, III, p. 352.

The motives of Ahmad Shah in undertaking his Indian expeditions have been thus analysed, by Elphinstone. In the first place, he expected thereby to consolidate his power at home. Though his was a national monarchy, he was himself, after all, an upstart. He hoped by means of his foreign wars to increase his reputation and thereby to win the loyalty of the Afghans. Not only would the Indian campaigns provide him with the expenses of maintaining his army but they would also enable him to heap favours and rewards on the Afghan chiefs. The Afghan cupidity has always been proverbial and this he hoped to satisfy by means of the foreign wars. Moreover, these would enable him to carry the leaders with him, and the habits of military obedience would prepare the ground for a cheerful submission at home.²⁸ The actual results of Abdali's Indian invasions in Afghanistan are not so easily ascertainable but, in the Punjab at least, he was indirectly largely responsible for the ultimate success of the Sikhs and his career in India is very intimately a part of the Sikh struggle for independence.

²⁸ Account of the Kingdom of Kabul, Vol. II, p. 283.

In 1748, Ahmad Shah for the first time invaded India. He crossed the Punjab rivers on bridges of boats and reached Lahore. He had 12,000 veteran troops with him. While Ahmad Shah was besieging Peshawar, Shahnawaz Khan, following the advice of his paymaster-general Adina Beg Khan, "a very devil under the appearance of a man,"²⁹ was meditating treason. Shahnawaz thought that the Wazir Qamaruddin Khan, his uncle, was also the father-in-law of his dispossessed brother. As such, naturally the Delhi government would take up his brother's cause at the earliest opportunity. He therefore opened a correspondence with Ahmad Shah on the following terms:— "The crown to Ahmad the wazirship to Shahnawaz."³⁰ Shahnawaz wrote to Ahmad Shah Abdali, offering to join him and to make a joint conquest of Hindustan. Ahmad Shah agreed. He showed good feeling with a view to ensure the crossing of the river at Attock. Shahnawaz's

²⁹ Siyar, III, p. 254.

³⁰ *Ibid.* According to Miskin he expected to be the wazir and the commander-in-chief but the small number of troops brought by Ahmad Shah was responsible for his defection.

break with the Delhi government was almost complete. He erased from his own seal the words "devoted servant of Muhammad Shah." On the border of his seals, instead of the Emperor's ancestors, he engraved the name of the twelve imams—thus declaring himself a Shia."³¹ But Adina Beg Khan in order to ingratiate himself with the Delhi wazir treacherously informed him of the meditated treason of his nephew. Shahnawaz was reclaimed from his folly and he broke with Abdali. But in the fight that ensued between Ahmad Shah and Shahnawaz, the former gained a complete victory. Shahnawaz fled and Adina Beg also precipitately took to his heels. Ahmad Shah, the Mughal heir-apparent, and Qamaruddin Khan, the wazir, advanced with a large army to meet Abdali. The Sirhind Governor, Ali Md. Khan Rohilla had already fled and Sirhind had been taken by Abdali. The two armies faced each other and in course of a continuous skirmish the wazir was killed. But the wazir's son, Muin-ul-Mulk or Mir Mannu, proved to be a very able commander. In the battle that followed at

³¹ Memoirs of Abdul Karim, p. 168. (Elliot).

Manupur, the imperialists numbered between 60,000 to 70,000. Abdali had 12,000 picked troops. An accident happened to the Afghan army. They had found some rockets in Lahore, which they put in the wrong way. These did the greatest damage to the Durrani army, which was thus practically self-defeated.³² Ala Singh, founder of the ruling house of Patiala, is said to have fought in this battle in the rank of the Mughal army.³³

While these momentous events were taking place, the Sikhs were fast consolidating their power. Even in 1745, after the death of Zakariya Khan, Jassa Singh descended to the plains and with the help of the other Sardars, raided Kasur.³⁴ As Forster says, between the Persian and the first Afghan invasion they became important from the military point of view. Taking advantage of the confusion resulting from the first Afghan

³² Husain Shahi, p. 7.

³³ Tarikh Sultani. The first coin that illustrates this campaign of Ahmad Shah has the following inscription: "Dar Dauran-i-Ahmad Shah Badshah Ahad ; Jarab Dar-us-Sultanat Lahore mimanat manush"—Rabi-ul-Awwal, 1161 A. H.

³⁴ Islamic Culture, July, 1929, "An Afghan Colony at Kasur."

invasion, they made themselves masters of a large portion of the Bari and Jalandhar Doabs. In order to meet the Afghan menace, Shah Nawaz had recalled Adina Beg Khan from the Jalandhar Doab and the Sikhs, left to themselves, could reassert their power. The Sikhs had plundered the baggages of the all-powerful Nadir Shah and it was too much to expect that they would spare the defeated Afghan Army on its return march. They followed the Afghan army up to the banks of the Indus, plundering Abdali's baggages.³⁵ When Ahmad Shah was in full flight, pursued by Mir Mannu at a distance, Sikh Sardars like Jassa Singh, Chharat Singh, Bharo Singh, Karora Singh, gathered a band of six to seven thousand fighters, occupied the Jalandhar Doab and named the band *Dal Khalsaji* or the army of the theocracy of Singhs.³⁶ Chharat Singh had a skirmish with Ahmad Shah, and some of Ahmad's horses and other belongings fell into the hands of the Singhs.³⁷

Muin-ul-Mulk or Mir Mannu was now appointed the Subahdar of Lahore. He had

³⁵ *Khalsa Nama*, p. 23.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Um̄dat-ut-Tawārikh*, p. 127.

enormous difficulties to contend with. The forces of disorder were rampant. His tussle with the Sikhs began immediately. The Sikhs had largely increased their number and had even begun to fight the foudjars. Mir Mannu sent troops against them to subdue them. Many were imprisoned and put to death. Almost every month moving columns were sent against them. They refused to fight in the open but plundered and devastated the parganahs. Whenever troops came to chastise them, they would either settle down as cultivators or fly to the mountains or jungles. When the troops of the Nazim returned, they would commence their depredations again. Those Moslems who could bring severed Sikh heads got their reward. The governor himself, pretending to go on hunting excursions, would advance 5 or 6 *Kos* and direct his troops to fall upon the Sikhs and put them to death. Within one year the roads became safe and many of the Sikhs settled down as farmers.³⁸

But he was not in a position to devote his undivided attention to this task. Abdali was near

³⁸ *Hakikat*, p. 26.

the gateway and was ever on the alert to find an opening. Safdar Jang, the new Delhi wazir, was jealous of Mir Mannu and encouraged conspiracies and plots against the newly appointed Subahdar. His own troops were also quite inadequate to meet the situation.

Safdar Jang incited Nasir Khan to plot against him. He had been appointed by Mir Mannu as the foudar of the mahals Sialkot, Pasrur, Gujrat and Aurangabad.³⁹ Mir Mannu forced Nasir Khan to fly to Delhi. Safdar Jang also sent Shahnawaz Khan to Multan to create disturbance against Muin. Shahnawaz went *via Lakhi Jangal*. He wrote letters to the Sikhs to create commotion in and around Lahore, expecting thereby to divert the attention of Muin. But the governor himself remained in Lahore and sent Koura Mal Khatri to fight Shahnawaz.⁴⁰ Shahnawaz was defeated and slain. Naturally all these events distracted the attention of Mir Mannu, and the Sikhs got a

³⁹ Miskin, p. 29.

⁴⁰ It is said that Koura Mal took with him a band of Sikh troops, and the most conspicuous of the Sikh leaders who accompanied him was Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. According to Panth Prakash (p. 618) Koura Mal's Sikh auxiliaries were responsible for the defeat of Shahnawaz.

respite. But they had as yet no strong fortified place under their control and were scattered throughout the Suba. Not a single month, however, passed without ten or twenty Sikh heads being severed and brought to Lahore.⁴¹

In the meantime, before Mir Mannu had settled down, Ahmad Shah invaded the Punjab once again (1750). This time, however, the Viceroy, after an indecisive campaign, thought it proper "to shake the chain of friendship and accommodation in the Abdali's ears and smother the fire that had not yet broken out in a flame."⁴² He could not get any help from Delhi. There "the nobles and Mirzas hoped that Mir Mannu might be destroyed and after that desirable event, they would take measures against Abdali. They would thus extirpate the thorn which the race of the Turanis had planted in their side."⁴³ Muin had therefore to stop Abdali's progress by promising to send him annually fourteen lakhs of rupees,⁴⁴ as the surplus revenue of the four mahals, Sialkot,

⁴¹ Hakikat, pp. 27-28.

⁴² Siyar, III, p. 288.

⁴³ Farhatun Nazirin ; Elliot, VIII, p. 166.

⁴⁴ Memoirs of Abdul Karim, p. 200.

Pasrur, Gujrat and Aurangabad.⁴⁵ Ahmad Shah, on his way back to Kabul, annexed Dera Ghaz Khan, Dera Ismail Khan, Shikarpur and Multan. After his return, he extended the Durrani empire in the west as far as Nishapur.⁴⁶

During the next two years, Abdali did not disturb Mir Mannu and he could devote his entire attention to the restoration of law and order. The Sikhs were now very hard pressed by the Turani governor. Taking advantage of the commotion, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Hara Singh, Karam Singh, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, Naja Singh and Chharat Singh had asserted themselves with their combined host, *the Dal Khalsa Jiu*⁴⁷ (according to Browne, the combined host at this stage numbered only 5,000). Muin-ul-Mulk had appointed Adina Beg Khan as the chastiser of the Sikhs but Adina Beg Khan began, as before, to intrigue with the Sikhs and did not take effective measures to suppress them. The Sikhs built the mud fort of Ram Rouni, afterwards famous as Ramgarh.

⁴⁵ Sujar III, p. 288.

⁴⁶ Elphinstone, Account of the Kingdom of Kabul, Vol. II, pp. 286-87.

⁴⁷ Panth Prakash, p. 613.

After the second Abdali invasion, Mir Mannu began a drive that seemed to be as successful as a similar attempt made earlier by Zakariya Khan. In order to suppress the Sikhs effectively, Mir Mannu ordered the casting of 1,000 Jizails. He personally supervised the Jizail practice of his soldiers and rewarded those who were accurate marksmen. The Sikhs were thus effectively subdued. Each Sikh head brought a reward of Rs. 10.

If any soldier lost his horse whilst campaigning against the Sikhs, another was supplied to him by the state.⁴⁸ As the Sikhs normally took shelter in the mountains or the jungles, the hill rajas were commanded to drive them out of their shelter and send them to Lahore. Many Sikhs were killed at Shahidganj. As Forster notes, "The Sikh nation might have been destroyed but for the intervention of Mir Mannu's minister, Koura Mal, himself a member of the Khalsa sect." His mediation brought about an accommodation, "the Sikhs were left to strengthen themselves, enlarge territory ;
* * * * * whilst Koura Mal lived,

⁴⁸ Miskin, p. 35.

his influence over the Sikhs restrained their depredations." ⁴⁹

Thus for many reasons Mir Mannu could not, between 1750 and 1752, take full advantage of his superiority. With an abundance of good artillery, against which the Sikhs were helpless, he might have overcome the Sikhs but the persuasions of Kouru Mal and the selfish policy of Adina Beg Khan ultimately prevailed. Even if we assume that it was possible for the Mughal authority to crush the Sikhs between 1750 and 1752, it was possible no longer after 1752, when Abdali began his Indian expeditions with greater earnestness. The Sikh struggle for independence now entered upon a new phase. Ahmad Shah Abdali invaded India for the third time in December 1751. (In this expedition, he defeated Mir Mannu, conquered Kashmir and obtained cession of the country as far east as Sirhind from the Mughal Emperor Ahmad Shah.) After four months' repeated engagements Mir Mannu was persuaded, contrary to the advice

⁴⁹ Forster, *Travels*, Letter XI, p. 273.

Browne, *India Tracts*, p. 17. Kouru Mal was really a Sahajdhari Sikh, i.e., he was an uninitiated follower of the Gurus.—*Panth Prakash*, pp. 610-11.

of Koura Mal, to come out of the entrenchments and fight. Koura Mal, the very soul of the army, was slain.⁵⁰ After his defeat, Mir Mannu submitted and he was appointed by Ahmad Shah Abdali as his governor in Lahore. The Afghan invader sent his agent Qalandar Khan to Delhi. Javid Khan, the eunuch, took advantage of the absence of the Wazir Safdar Jang, agreed to all the demands of the ambassador and ceded Lahore and Multan. Ahmad Shah left Mir Mannu as his governor in Lahore. He was to send him the surplus revenue of the Punjab and receive the final orders of Abdali in important matters. A colony of Suddozai Afghans was planted in Multan. In this expedition he also conquered Kashmir and left Sukh Jiwan Mal, a Khatri, as his governor there.⁵¹ Here, it is interesting to note that Safdar

⁵⁰ Hakikat Bina, p. 26 :—After four months' fight, Rustam-i-hind was defeated ; Khalsanama, p. 246. Koura Mal, when hard pressed, asked for help but Adina Beg dissuaded Muin from sending any reinforcement.

Farhatun Nazirin : " Adina Beg availing himself of this opportunity, in the midst of battle instructed one of the Afghans of Kasur to put an end to the existence of that unworthy wretch Koura Mal, by a musket ball."

⁵¹ Siyar, III. It is interesting to note that he did not coin money in Lahore in deference to the wish of Muin, in

Jang, the Delhi wazir, a rival of the able Punjab governor Mir Mannu, had not come to Mir Mannu's aid against Abdali. He was not a little pleased to hear of Muin's embarrassment. In spite of the Emperor's repeated orders of recall, he continued the work of punishing the Zamindars of Oudh and Allahabad. He thus enabled Abdali to defeat and discredit his rival. But he was himself deservedly overreached. When it was too late, he entered into a defensive agreement with Malhar Rao Holkar and Jayappa Sindhia against Abdali (1752). According to this agreement, the Marathas were to defend the Emperor against foreign enemies and domestic rebels. The Emperor was to pay them thirty lakhs for driving Abdali out and twenty lakhs for suppressing internal rebels. The Emperor agreed to grant to the Peshwa the *chouth* of the Punjab, Sindh, Sialkot, Pasrur, Gujrat, Aurangabad, Hissar and other regions.⁵² But already Qalandar Khan, Abdali's ambassador,

order to save the face of the Emperor. We have specimens of his coin of this period that refer to Jarab Peshawar, Jarab Darul Aman Multan but not Lahore. Mr. Whitehead's Catalogue, however, shows a coin of that year.

⁵² Rajwade, Vol. I, No. 1 ; Vol. VI, No. 199.

had secured cession of the Punjab, Sirhind and Multan from the Great Mughal. Safdar Jang found himself foiled and nothing came out of his project. But the plan is interesting as it foreshadows the later attempt of Ghaziuddin and Adina Beg Khan to defeat and drive out the Durranis from the Punjab with the help of the Marathas.

Thus we pass on to the second phase in the history of the Sikh struggle for independence. Henceforth the Sikhs were concerned not so much with the Delhi Emperor and his agents as with the Abdali monarch and his representatives. The state of things was, however, further complicated by the ambitious designs of the adventurer Adina Beg Khan and the weak-kneed and unscrupulous policy of Imad-ul-Mulk who, as wazir, began to control the destinies of the empire from 1754.

The support of Kouru Mal, the selfish policy of Adina beg, rivalry between Safdar Jang and Mir Mannu, Javid Khan and Safdar Jang, the weakness of Ahmad Shah, the Mughal Emperor, the ability of his namesake, the Abdali Chief—all had something to do with the survival of the Sikhs. The invasion of Nadir Shah in 1739 and the first three invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali (1748-'52) gave

the Sikhs opportunities to organize themselves. The history of the next few years was to show how the Sikhs passed through a series of reverses to complete victory.

CHAPTER III

ANARCHY AND CONFUSION—THE PUNJAB, A COCKPIT—(1752-61)

Ahmad Shah Abdali left the Punjab in a distracted condition. The administration had been very much enfeebled. The Sikhs again plundered the Jalandhar Doab, where many Muhammadan families became extinct. This revival of the Sikh power compelled Muin to send Adina Beg Khan and Siddik Beg Khan against them. This time Adina Beg most probably thought that it would be expedient to let the Sikhs know that he could do them great injury if only he was so minded. He fell on the Sikhs at Makhawal, put many of them to death and compelled them to disperse.¹ But either he had not the power or he did not consider it prudent to crush the Sikhs

¹ Browne, *India Tracts*, p. 17. In the *Khalsa Nama* we read that the Dal Khalsa that had gathered at Makhawal fled to Bhara without any fight, p. 256. We find, however, a reference to a victory of Adina Beg over the Sikhs earlier, before the third invasion of Ahmad Shah in which he had killed 700 Sikhs, p. 23.

altogether. It was from the Sikh rebellion that he derived his importance. He checked them but did not try to crush them entirely. He succeeded admirably in his policy of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. It is even said that he took some Sikhs in his employ, one of them being Jassa Singh Thoka (carpenter). "He entered into a secret understanding with them, by which their excursions were limited * * * * * and they gathered strength and resources for future efforts.² Elsewhere, however, the Sikhs felt that Mir Mannu would not permit lawlessness and that he had even now enough strength to be able to quell them. In fact, the governor undertook in person the task of suppressing the rebels, slaying large numbers of them. We find him sending detachments of his troops to stamp out these irrepressible marauders. Even a day or two before his death, we hear of the governor sending Khwaja Mirza Khan, with some Mughalia troops against the Sikhs and when they brought Sikh heads, they were given rewards.³

² Malcolm, Sketch, p. 92 ; also Ahwal-i-Adina Beg Khan refers to his understanding with the Sikhs.

³ Miskin, p. 44.

Mir Mannu died in November, 1753, leaving the Punjab in a state of lawlessness. His failure was, as in the case of Zakariya Khan, due to foreign invasions, coupled with repeated Sikh risings. Moreover, indirectly Mir Mannu was responsible for the growth of the power of the Sikhs, he kept a big army which entailed a heavy expenditure. He had to squeeze the people to defray his expenses. This state of oppression was best suited to enable the Sikh community to secure converts. No individual who had grievances against the government could hope for redress unaided. But the only organization in the Punjab that could give protection and secure redress was that of the Sikhs, and it was one of their customs, true to the principle of fraternity, to support one another. Naturally those who had grievances, those who had suffered, those who were beggared, turned to the Sikhs, were admitted into their community and thus derived strength from union. In this way the number of Sikh converts steadily increased.

After Mir Mannu's death his infant son Muhammad Amin Khan was recognised by Abdali as his Subahdar in the Punjab, with Mir Mumin

Khan, an experienced officer, as the deputy governor.⁴ All power, of course, lay in the hands of Mir Mannu's wife Mughlani Begam. Her profligacy and capriciousness alienated many faithful adherants of her late husband, and rebellions became very frequent. One of these rebels was Qasim Khan, who had risen high in the favour of the Begam. He had been worsted in a chance fight with the Sikhs in which three hundred Badakshani soldiers of his were killed. The historian Miskin who took part in this battle also saw many other dead bodies lying on both sides of the road. Thus trounced by the Sikhs, Qasim Khan formed a very high opinion of their fighting strength and thought of making friends with them. With their help, he hoped to make himself master of Lahore and then advance on to Delhi itself. With a view to win over a band of 8,000 Sikh soldiers, he gave them arms and ammunition worth several thousand rupees. This exhausted his treasury and he was unable to pay his own troops, who rebelled against him. He was then imprisoned by the Begam.⁵

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 45.

⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 46-47.

Mughlani Begam secretly sent her uncle Khwaja Abdullah Khan to the Afghan monarch ; Mulla Aman Khan from Peshawar was sent by the Durrani monarch with 10,000 soldiers, cavalry and infantry. Khwaja Mirza who had opposed Mughlani Begam, was imprisoned, Lahore was plundered by the Durrani soldiers and Mughlani Begam was left as the Subahdar with Abdullah as her deputy. The two quarrelled, and Khwaja Abdullah usurped all authority. Mughlani Begam secretly wrote to the Delhi wazir Imad-ul-Mulk to rescue her and offered her daughter Umda Begam in marriage. By forced marches, the Mughal army reached Lahore, Abdullah fled and Mughlani Begam's authority was restored. Imad, however, did not like that power should remain in the hands of that masterful and characterless woman. She was imprisoned and sent towards Sirhind. Mir Mumin was appointed Subahdar with Sayed Jamiluddin as his deputy. In all these transactions, particularly in the expulsion of Abdullah, Imad had been advised and even helped by Adina Beg Khan, the powerful foudar of the Jalandhar Doab. Khwaja Abdullah had fled to Qandahar. There he informed Abdali

of the doings of Imad and the restraint put upon Mughlani Begam, whom Abdali had addressed as daughter. A Durrani Army under Abdus Samad Khan was sent to the Punjab. As they approached Shah Dera, Jamiluddin appealed to Adina Beg for help. Adina Beg advised him to retreat to the Jalandhar Doab and Jamiluddin hurriedly left Lahore to join Adina there.⁶ Soon after Ahmad Shah himself invaded India for the fourth time in November, 1756.

All these upheavals happening in the interval between the death of Muin-ul-Mulk and the fourth invasion of Ahmad Shah Abdali, not only encouraged but also very considerably strengthened the Sikhs. "The Sikhs took all those advantages which the local distractions of a falling empire offered them, of extending and establishing their power. Their bands under their most active leaders, plundered in every direction."⁷ Timur Shah notes: "Because of all these commotions nobody directed his attention towards the Sikhs and they plundered and looted everywhere. Even the more

⁶ Miskin, pp. 51-61.

⁷ Malcolm, . . .

law-abiding among them withheld the payment of rent.⁸

This time Abdali took his Indian business more seriously than before and wanted to march straight upon Delhi. As the Sikhs were not powerful enough to meet Ahmad Shah in the open, they hung about his wings, plundered all people who straggled from his camp and cut off his provisions. Ahmad Shah resented all this, but all he could do now was to threaten them with punishment in his return journey.⁹ On the approach of Abdali, Adina Beg had left Jalandhar Doab and fled to the mountains in the north (to the desert tract of Hansi according to Siyar, which is not likely). In Delhi, Ahmad Shah looted on an enormous scale. All men, rich and poor, aristocrats and commoners, big merchants and small cultivators, were indiscriminately plundered. Mughlani Begam knew the secrets of many of the noble houses and she was particularly helpful in guiding the Afghans to the hiding places of the treasures of the Amirs.¹⁰ The plundered treasures were loaded on 28,000

⁸ Hakikat, p. 29.

⁹ Khalsanama, p. 26, Browne, p. 20.

¹⁰ Husain Shahi.

beasts of burden, with 80,000 horse and foot following him, every man in the company loaded with spoils.¹¹ Ahmad Shah's army could not but suffer at the hands of the Sikh marauders, and all that he could do, was to order those whom he left behind "to take vengeance on the Sikhs for all the excesses which they had committed."¹²

Before leaving Delhi, Ahmad Shah had married a daughter of Muhammad Shah, and a daughter of Alamgir II had been given in marriage to Timur Shah. The Emperor had been forced to formally cede the Punjab, Kashmir and Sindh as also the Sirhind district. For the government of these ceded tracts, Timur Shah, his son, was left as his viceroy in Lahore, with Jahan Khan, the able Afghan general, as his wazir. Ahmad Shah had promised Mughlani Begam the Jalandhar "Doab, Jammu and Kashmir for her services. But before leaving, he had revoked the gift.¹³ Thus the Begam found to her great mortification that the dishonourable part that she had played only brought shame and ruin on so many noble families

¹¹ S. P. D., II, No. 71.

¹² Malcolm, Sketch, p. 94.

¹³ Miskin, pp. 66, 67 and 69.

intimately related to herself and the high hopes she had been encouraged to entertain, proved chimerical. She found that the part of a traitor is not merely dishonourable but also unprofitable. But the worst was yet to come.

The first task of Timur Shah and Jahan Khan was the subjugation of the Sikhs. News reached them that many Sikh soldiers had gathered at *Chakguru*, that is, Amritsar, for their holy bath. Jahan Khan planned an attack. He wrote to Haji Atai Khan to meet him there on an appointed day and then make a concerted attack on the Sikhs. Jahan Khan with 2,000 sowars marched to Amritsar. Haji Atai Khan, not turning up in time, Jahan Khan was very hard-pressed by the Sikhs. Ultimately, however, Haji Atai reached with re-inforcements. The Sikhs were defeated and put to flight. Many of them were killed.¹⁴ Amritsar was occupied and the holy shrine desecrated.¹⁵

Adina Beg Khan, foudar of the Jalandhar Doab; was very wisely left by Timur Shah in charge of that region. He had acted as the gover-

¹⁴ Miskin, p. 77.

¹⁵ Browne, *India Tracts*, p. 20.

nor of that region almost continuously for a very long time and had created there a great local influence and, with his 10,000 troops, was far too strong to be dislodged without considerable difficulty.¹⁶ He alone knew how to keep the Sikhs there under some sort of control by taking some of them into his service and by a policy of general friendliness.¹⁷ Timur Shah agreed to Adina Beg's retaining his foudari on payment of 36 lakhs a year. He would not come to the Darbar but would be represented there by his representative Dila Ram. Adina Beg became a defaulter and Dila Ram was thrown into prison. Mughlani Begam stood security. Dila Ram was released and the Begam told him to bring money from Adina Beg. But the unscrupulous and ungrateful man did not make the payment, with the result that the Begam was insulted, beaten by Jahan

¹⁶ Miskin, p. 79.

¹⁷ According to Sikh tradition when there was a breach between Adina and the Durrani government of Timur Shah the wily ex-foujdar openly made an alliance with the Khalsa and would laughingly call himself a "Bhoda Sikh," or a Sikh without hair. Whether true or not, this story is really characteristic of the man.—Panth Prakash, p. 653.

Khan himself with sticks and her ornaments were taken away.”¹⁸

In the meantime, Jahan Khan further infuriated the Sikh community by maltreating one of its most respected members, a religious guide. The Sikhs rose up on all sides. At his wits' end, Jahan Khan summoned Adina Beg to Lahore. But the cautious foudar declined to obey the summons and clearly perceiving the consequences of this disobedience withdrew to the mountains in the north. Adina naturally entered into an alliance with the Sikhs—“founded on a scheme of combined hostilities with the Afghans.” When Sarafraz Khan was sent against Adina Beg, he was defeated and driven out of the Jalandhar Doab.¹⁹ In whatever direction troops were sent, they returned defeated. The Sikhs used to approach Lahore in swarms and they also plundered the suburbs. The Afghans could not always come out to fight them. Thus everywhere there was anarchy, confusion and

¹⁸ Miskin, pp. 78, 79 and 80.

In the *Ahwal-i-Adina Beg Khan*, we read that an agent of Adina Beg, Bhowani Das, was also tortured in the days of Zakariya Khan for his master's defalcation, p. 5.

¹⁹ Siyar, III, p. 376 (mention is made of Murad Khan).

lawlessness. The prestige of Afghan arms disappeared. In the Maratha records, we find that the Sikhs congregated around Lahore, in the Doab and even in the Sirhind region. They defeated Sadat Khan Afridi in the Doab. They also defeated Khwajah Abid Khan who had been sent from Lahore and plundered him.²⁰

Adina Beg Khan, however, introduced a further complication by calling in the Marathas. It is not very difficult to guess his motives. He must have been clear-sighted enough to see that the Sikhs would not be of much use to him in a protracted war against the Durrani, however successful their marauding bands might be during the absence of Abdali. The only power in India on which he could with any confidence rely was the Maratha. Moreover, with Maratha aid, he could expect to be the real master of the land of the five rivers. They had so much to do elsewhere that it would not be possible for them to rule the Punjab directly and he would be able to administer it in their name. The Sikhs would never allow him to be the *de facto* ruler of the Punjab, and this

²⁰ S. P. D., II, 83, dated 17th November, 1757.

was his life's ambition. Like Talleyrand, it was a characteristic of his political conduct repeatedly to undo his own work. In the midst of all the upheavals between 1745-'58, we find him maintaining his position with prodigious suppleness. Even in the eighteenth century so full of successful adventures, he seems to have been a man without a peer. The author of the *Imad-us-Sadat* characterises him in words that might well serve as the motto for a cartoon—"Adina Beg Khan would drive away the flies from the face of the Durranis at one time and brush the dust from the beard of the Sikh at another."²¹ It must, however, be admitted that he had an uncanny perception of the realities of the political situation and the success which he attained was as much due to his unscrupulousness as to his tact, resourcefulness and his very clear vision in the midst of the shifting scenes on the political stage.

The Maratha interlude which Adina Beg introduced in the Sikh struggle for independence might have developed into one of supreme importance. It is tempting to think of the possibility of union

²¹ *Imad-us-Sadat*, p. 72.

between these two warlike peoples of the north and the south against the Afghans. Such an alliance in 1758, might have been fraught with momentous consequences and might have been a very decisive factor in the events leading up to the campaign of 1761. "The supposed superiority of the Marathas in guerilla warfare was a myth. The Afghans, with their tireless Turki steeds outrode 100 miles in 14 hours to surprise Malhar Rao Holkar. Atai Khan performed an equally remarkable feat when he caught Gobind Pant Bundela. In the skirmishing outside Panipat, the Afghans almost invariably had the better of it. On the other hand, when it came to shock action, the Maratha cavalry, with its superb *elan* never failed to rout their opponents." ²² The Sikhs with their endurance and rapidity of movement, the excellent size and swiftness of their horses, resembled the ill-clad but powerful troops of Sivaji. They were pre-eminently well-fitted for a guerilla method of warfare, being in this respect very much superior to the Marathas. If as a

²² H. G. Rawlinson, Account of the Last Battle of Panipat, Introduction.

supplement to the Maratha plan of shock action, there had been the Sikh scheme of skirmishing after the Parthian fashion behind the enemy, affairs might have taken an entirely different turn. It has been said about the Sikh that even in contending hand to hand, he was terrible. A Sikh soldier had really to be killed twice.”²³ But a plan combining the Sikh and Maratha methods of warfare was not evolved. It is, however, interesting to note that in 1760, before the Marathas encamped at Panipat, after Kunjpura had been captured, the Bhao, the Maratha Commander, proceeded one stage towards Sirhind to win over the Sikhs and the Jats, and start a combined action against the Afghans. But the Bhao had to retrace his steps suddenly when he received the news of Abdali's crossing at Bagpat.²⁴ The attempt to bring about a concerted action thus came too late.

²³ The author of the *Imad-us-Sadat* wrote that the Durranis were the finest soldiers ; the next best were the Sikhs. They could put a man to death from a distance of 900 *Kadams* and on horseback they could go 200 *Kos*. P. 71.

²⁴ Peshwa Daftar, XXI, No. 197. Letter, dated 27th November, 1960.

But neither among the Marathas nor among the Sikhs was there anyone farsighted enough to realize that combination was the vital need of the hour. "The unbecoming pride and presumption of the Marathas, their failure to grasp the realities of the situation, the proverbial Maratha greed for plunder, the presence of the wily Adina Beg, whose interest it was to keep these two peoples divided, the prevalent Sikh view that regarded the Marathas as intruders—all combined to make a fusion between these two peoples beyond even the domain of possibility.

A large army of the Marathas, encamped in Delhi under the command of Raghunath Rao, came now to his assistance. "When he saw Sikh power advancing every day, he invited the Deccani Sardars and assured them that they could conquer the whole region up to the Indus."²⁵ Adina Beg stipulated for the payment of a daily sum of one lakh of rupees for a march and fifty thousand for a halt.²⁶ The Marathas joined Adina Beg in Sirhind. Abdus Samad, the Durrani governor of Sirhind, was worsted. He himself fought bravely

²⁵ Khalsanama, p. 27.

²⁶ Miskin, p. 79.

but his soldiers fled and he was captured.²⁷ Adina Beg had still many Sikh mercenaries in his employ. It is said that Sirhind was plundered by them before the Marathas. The Deccances regarded plunder as their exclusive privilege and they resolved to punish the Sikhs for thus forestalling them. But Adina Beg perhaps, felt that in such a case, even a future reconciliation would be beyond the region of possibility and there was no knowing whether he would be able to keep on good terms with his new friends. He informed the Sikhs beforehand, who under cover of a dark night withdrew.²⁸ Timur Shah and Jahan Khan considered it prudent to retreat before the advancing Maratha army. The Marathas entered Lahore (April, 1756). Timur Shah's rule in the Punjab lasted barely one year. In his precipitate retreat, Timur left his baggages and even his *topkhana* behind him, to be plundered by the invading army.

²⁷ Husain Shahi. The story of Sikh occupation of Lahore and coining by Jassa Singh, does not appear to be true. They, however, occupied the suburbs, but on the approach of the Marathas they retreated.

²⁸ Malcolm, Sketch, p. 95.

Panth Prakash, p. 656.

Many of his Hindustani soldiers were left behind : while crossing the Chenab, such was the hurry of the flight. The Marathas could not cross the river because of its high water level. They could not, therefore, pursue the Durrani's up to Attock.²⁹

The Marathas did not consider it prudent to take upon themselves the task of direct administration. They left Adina Beg Khan as the governor there, and fixed a yearly tribute of 75 lakhs of rupees.³⁰ Adina Beg himself went to the Jalandhar Doab, leaving his son-in-law Khwaja Mirza Khan as his deputy in Lahore. The Marathas evacuated the Punjab largely because the pay of the army had begun to fall into arrears. A debt of 88 lakhs was due to the army. In the Punjab the Marathas could not make war pay for war, as was invariably their habit. They were also recalled to the Deccan to make a grand attack on the Nizam, whose existence in the heart of the Maratha country was a great danger. During the monsoon of 1759, the plans for humbling the Nizam were completed, and by the end of 1759,

²⁹ S. P. D., Vol. XXVII, No. 48.

³⁰ Siyar, III, p. 377.

all the famous Maratha warriors gathered and the campaign of Udgir began.³¹ They left Jankoji near Delhi to look after affairs in the north. Adina Beg placed Siddik Beg Khan in charge of Sirhind. He himself died soon after (October, 1758).³²

Adina Beg was fortunate even in his death. If he had lived longer, the fifth Abdali invasion would have been partly directed against him. This wonderful man undoubtedly played a prominent part in the history of the Sikh struggle for independence. He held his own amidst the clashing interests of the decadent Mughals, the triumphant Durranis, the indomitable Sikhs and the arrogant Marathas. Though always actuated by

³¹ S. P. D., Vol. I, Introduction.

³² Din Muhammad of Batala says that during Adina Beg's viceroyalty an attempt was made by his lieutenant Mir Aziz to teach the Sikhs a lesson by storming the fort of Ram Rowni or Ramgarh. After a protracted siege, the Sikhs who had harassed the besiegers by their sallies escaped by battering down one of the walls. They were pursued and many were slain. Those who survived were out of admiration styled by their fellow Sikhs as Ramgarhias. I made a search for the memoirs of Din Md., a contemporary historian. I was told by my friends in the Punjab that the family can be traced, but not the memoirs.

motives of personal advancement, he had an understanding with the Sikhs that was long-standing and he knew that this made his friendship essential to any outside power that wanted to govern the Punjab. It was precisely because of this that at times he befriended the Sikhs, who were so useful to him in the furtherance of his own schemes. Thereby he indirectly helped the Sikhs during a very dark period of their history. His death now provided them with an opportunity of which they were not slow to take advantage. Even when Adina's power was at its height, the Sikhs were steadily reasserting themselves. Chharat Singh in the Bari Doab and Jassa Singh in the Jalandhar Doab, were making their power felt.³³ After the death of Adina Beg Khan, Sikh territorial ambition seemed to find full scope. They were now irrepressible. Khwaja Mirza Khan could not now cope with them, Dattaji Sindhia sent Sabaji to Lahore. The Sikhs in the meantime defeated Sambhu Das,³¹ Dewan of the deceased Adina Beg,

³³ *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, I, p. 147.

³⁴ *Siyar*, III, p. 377. Panth Prakash gives his name as Biswambhar Mal and says that he was put to death by Karam Singh at Hosiarpur and Adina Beg's country was occupied by the Sikhs, p. 672.

and practically made themselves masters of the Jalandhar Doab. The Sikhs are even said to have defeated and driven back an Afghan army led by the redoubtable Jahan Khan himself.³⁵

Affairs took a new turn when Ahmad Shah Abdali, who had been intent upon leading another invasion of India, concluded a treaty with Nasir Khan, chief of the Baluchis. He was now free to turn his attention to India. Najib-ud-daula, Abdali's agent in Delhi, was besieged by Dattaji Sindhia at Sakartal and sent frantic appeals to Ahmad Shah. He would have come in any case to avenge the expulsion of Timur Shah and Jahan Khan by the Marathas. On his approach, the Marathas left the Punjab and retreated in the direction of Shahjahanabad. Ahmad Shah passed through the Punjab, re-establishing his authority in the province. The Sikhs were by now sufficiently numerous, well-organised and strong to be able to give the conqueror a fight. The Afghans could only triumph after a hard-fought contest in which 2,000

³⁵ Rajwade, VI, p. 378. Bakshi Jahan Khan with 12/14 thousand Abdali fougj fought with the Sikhs. He was very roughly handled and driven back.

of them were slain.³⁶ Lahore was occupied by Abdali. Thus Afghan sway was once again re-established in the Punjab along the main route and Abdali advanced upon Delhi. Wazir Imad-ul-Mulk murdered the Emperor Alamgir II and the siege of Sakartal was raised on the news of the approach of Abdali. This was in December, 1759. This campaign was a protracted affair. The third battle of Panipat, which registered the crowning victory of Ahmad Shah over the Marathas was fought on the 14th January, 1761.

Ahmad Shah was in such a hurry to measure his sword with the Marathas that he could make no permanent arrangement for the Punjab. While he was campaigning in the Doab or in the Delhi region, the utmost disorder prevailed in the Punjab. He had appointed Zain Khan at Sirhind. Sarbuland Khan had been given the Subah of Lahore and sent with 12,000 soldiers there. But Sarbuland Khan remained in the Jalandhar Doab and sent the subahdari sanad to Dadan Khan in Lahore, who after a time, found himself so very hard pressed by the Sikhs that he offered to resign

³⁶ Rajwade, I, p. 146. Jahan Khan himself was wounded. Abdali left 6,000 soldiers behind him in Lahore.

to Sarbuland Khan. Amir Muhammad Khan was appointed the next governor of Lahore. Jassa Sing Ahluwalia, Hakikat Singh Kanheya, Hari Singh Bhangi, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia approached Lahore, and occupied the suburbs. For about fifteen days they plundered the surrounding regions and moved about defiantly. Amir Khan, somehow, managed to remain within the walls. At that time Ahmad Shah's treasury was in the fort of Lahore. All the big men of the town met to deliberate. They said that if the Sikhs occupied the town, the treasury would fall into their hands. Therefore, it was better to buy them off. The Sikhs, after receiving a big sum of money (Rs. 30,000) retired. Sarbuland Khan was very much displeased on hearing this news. He wrote to Yakub Khan and Ajmal Khan Durrani, asking them to imprison Amir Muhammad Khan, which they did. They then took over the charge of Lahore.³⁷

Kasi Pandit is responsible for the statement that after the third battle of Panipat, the Shah wanted to seize the empire of Hindustan, but that

³⁷ Umdat-ut-Tawarikh, pp. 150-53.

was ordered to give an account of all the money he had collected. He said that most of the money had been spent in fighting the Sikhs and in buying them off. Ahmad Shah was much displeased to hear this and ordered him off to Multan. The Subahdari of Lahore was conferred on Khwaja Abid Khan.³⁸

When Ahmad Shah began his return march, the Sikhs began to harass him. Browne wrote: "After the third battle of Panipat as soon as the Durrani army had passed the Sutlej, the Sikhs began to plunder the stragglers, but Ahmad Shah could do nothing as his army was loaded with plunder. Every night he had to throw up a slight work round his camp and in this manner he continued his march to Attock, the Sikhs following him all the way. When the Afghans crossed the Attock, the Sikhs returned to blockade Lahore."³⁹ We find this defiance of the all-powerful victor of Panipat recorded with some surprise by Timur Shah himself. When Ahmad

³⁸ Umdat-ut-Tawarikh, I, p. 173.

³⁹ Browne, India Tracts, p. 22 ; also Khalsanama, p. 326. "The Sikhs followed him up to the banks of the Indus."

Shah crossed three of the Punjab rivers, Chharat Singh, a Sikh chief with 1,200 soldiers, began to pursue him, and every day as the Durrani troops would begin their march, the Sikhs would hang about and harass them in every way. After one watch of the night, they would go away and in the morning, when the Durrani march began, they would begin their activity anew. At night, they used to take rest at a distance of 10 *kos* from the troops of Ahmad Shah. Ahmad Shah was eager for a pitched battle to drive them out, but he got no opportunity.⁴⁰ Ahmad Shah was taking away with him a large number of captives, most of them females. They were rescued by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, when Abdali was on the banks of the Jhelum. Jassa Singh provided them with money and sent them home.⁴¹

With Adina Beg dead and the Marathas overwhelmed, the state of things became simplified. From 1752-61, it had been really a four-cornered struggle in which the Durranis, the Marathas, the Sikhs and Adina Beg Khan, had all participated. Now, the Sikhs alone were left to fight the issue

⁴⁰ Hakikat, p. 32.

⁴¹ Panth Prakash, p. 680.

out with the Durrani, the other two contestants having dropped out. To the careful student of the career of the great Durrani invader, it is clear that he definitely intended to rule over the Punjab and Sirhind, Kashmir and Sindh. Delhi, Agra, Mathura and other places were reserved for plunder, but the former tracts, conquered by the sword and formally ceded by the Delhi emperors, were intended to be kept for direct government. Perhaps he did not take the Sikhs seriously in spite of the annoyance which they caused him. Most probably he persisted in thinking that it would not be at all difficult for him to defeat them. If he could crush the formidable Maratha power with one swift blow, he could certainly overwhelm this contemptible band of freebooters. But he was now to find that a fight with the Sikhs was not a matter of strategy or tactics, not a matter of effective military combination or calculation. A defeat inflicted on them would be like "a sword slash through a pond." Already he had a vexatious experience that his name did not inspire terror in their bosom, his resounding victories only stirred them into defiance. Unperceived by him and largely because of the anarchy and disorder

caused by him, the Sikh nation was now far more strong and far more well-organized than it had been in the days of Zakariya Khan. The most glorious chapter of Sikh history and one of the most glorious chapters of Indian history was now to begin. It is a record of the duel in which the all-powerful Afghan conqueror was worn out by an obscure people who successfully wrested from his closed fist that part of India which the house of Timur had failed to preserve from him.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER PANIPAT—1761-67

“ The Abdali Governor of Lahore, was in no better position than the commander of an outlying post.” The Sikhs were successfully plundering the country around and building strongholds and fortresses. The most important of these newbuilt forts was the mud fort at Gujranwala. The Sikh *sardars* were engaged in securing lands for themselves. Jai Singh Kanheya took Batala, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia secured Kalanur. Gujar Singh and Chharat Singh plundered the country around Yaminabad. Khwaja Abid Khan, the Durrani governor, marched out to expel the Sikhs from Gujranwala. He besieged the Sikhs. But the Sikhs who were outside the fort combined with those who were within it and not only did they completely defeat him but also looted all his ammunition.¹ As the author of the *Siyar-ul-*

¹ *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, I, p. 154.

Mutakkherin remarks in another connection, the Sikhs were getting numerous, they were aware of the weakness of the existing government and they knew that Ahmad Shah was at a great distance.² Khwaja Abid, having thus suffered a defeat, retreated within the walls of Lahore. The Sikhs assembled at Lahore, held a meeting of the *Sarbut Khalsa*. They decided to invest Jandiala, 12 miles east of Amritsar. Jandiala was the stronghold of the Niranjani sect. They were the most persistent enemies of the Sikhs and the most steadfast friends of the Durrani, although the sect itself was Hindu. In their struggle for independence the Sikhs suffered much molestation because of these people, whose one aim was to ingratiate themselves into the favour of the Durrani. They would even point out the Sikh boys and women, hiding in cornfields, so that the Durrani might drag them out. To enumerate only a few most important cases, it was on the information of a Niranjani that a very prominent Sikh, Sukka Singh, was arrested in 1753 ; it was a Niranjani, Harmukh Das, who supplied information leading

² Siyar, IV, p. 3.

to the arrest of Taru Singh in 1746 ; it was a Niranjani who had supplied information leading to the persecution of the family of a prominent Sikh, Mehtab Singh, in 1740.³ It was therefore natural that the Sikhs should launch a united attack on this enemy, so near their home. Akaldas, the Jandiala Thanadar, wrote a pressing letter to Ahmad Shah Abdali as his lieutenants in the Punjab were unable to give him any protection. This news that his officers were defeated and dispersed and his supporters were about to be overwhelmed by that obscure band of marauders, was sufficient to stir Abdali to action. He made one of his famous lightning marches.⁴ But the Sikhs had already got information of his approach. They

³ Panth Prakash, pp. 633, 694, 551, 577.

⁴ The history of this march, as narrated by the author of the Tarikh Husain Shahi, is far too dramatic to warrant its acceptance in its entirety as sober history—it is said that after a dream in which he was exhorted to go to the Punjab, Ahmad Shah jumped up, got on horseback with 300 of his bodyguard and started straight for India leaving only a word to Shah Wali Khan to follow him. It was not until almost unattended he had reached Jandiala and the Sikhs had fled away on his approach, that Shah Wali Khan could join him. The march was so rapid.

got up on their horses and fled to the other side of the Sutlej,⁵ where, joined by the Cis-Sutlej Sikhs, they began to plunder the regions around Sirhind and Maler Kotla and massed troops to the number of 40,000.^{5a} Ahmad Shah's spies brought him the news that the Sikhs were in *mouja* Koup. Zain Khan, Subahdar of Sirhind, Bhikan Khan of Maler Kotla, Murtaza Khan and Qasim Khan were pressed very hard by the Sikhs. They had not a sufficient number of soldiers and guns to enable them to defeat the Sikhs in the open field. Ahmad Shah ordered Zain Khan to come out and fight the Sikhs, assuring him at the same time that he also would join in the attack. Zain Khan according to his instructions attacked next morning and was reinforced by the main Afghan army. The fight took place near the village Koup. The Sikhs could not beat a successful retreat and suffered a crushing defeat. The pursuit and massacre continued till nightfall. The battle had begun in the morning. The Sikhs who survived fled away. This battle is famous in

⁵ Umdat-ut-Tawarikh, pp. 156, 157.

^{5a} Khalsanama, p. 32.

Sikh history as the *Ghallughara* or the great massacre."

Ahmad Shah went to Sirhind. There he was met by Najib-ud-Daula and others who complimented him upon his victory. Abdali did not advance any further. As a Jesuit priest at Lucknow notes : "The Sikhs, a people barbarous and warlike, by their progress in the province of Lahore and the country adjacent, interrupted the Shah from thinking of any other project which before he might have determined on."^{6a} In connection with this expedition of Ahmad Shah and his triumphant victory over the Sikhs, we should note carefully his treatment of Ala Singh of Patiala. Ahmad Shah's successful expeditions but his failure to crush the Sikhs convey a very unfavourable impression about him as a statesman.

⁶ The pursuit was continued up to Barnala ; my account of the battle is based on Husain Shahi and Khalsanama. The number of killed and wounded—Miskin, 25,000 ; Husain Shahi, 30,000 ; Forster, 25,000. 40,000 Sikhs fought with 30,000 of Ahmad's army. Murray was told by a Moslem soldier of Maler Kotla who fought in the battle that only 12,000 were killed and wounded (Prinsep, p. 20). This seems very likely and rumour has much magnified the number.

Even on the morrow of the *Ghallughara*, the Sikhs were as dauntless as ever. Ahmad Shah was no nearer to crushing them now, than he had been before. Cunningham describes him as "an ideal Afghan genius, fitted for conquest but incapable of empire." Apparently Ahmad Shah was only a bold adventurer, very much resembling the boy-king Charles XII, the wonder of Europe, who planned nothing right, whose life was, from the beginning to the end, a wild and senseless out-*ing*. But in reality, Ahmad Shah was a statesman as much as he was a soldier, and this fact should be noted to the credit of the Sikhs that they were successful against one who was not a mere adventurer, but a brilliant soldier and a clear-sighted statesman, with a firm grasp of the realities of the situation.

Ala Singh of Patiala had become the most powerful chieftain in the Cis-Sutlej region. He had established a stronghold at Bhowanighar, conquered Sanawar and had succeeded in eclipsing the Rai family of Raikot, hitherto the most powerful in the Cis-Sutlej region. More than any other Sikh chief, he knew how to take advantage of the commotion caused by the invasions of Ahmad Shah

Abdali. He had even the audacity to plunder Prince Timur when he was transporting a portion of the plunder of Delhi (March, 1757). Timur was also robbed for the second time near Maler Kotla.⁷ When Ahmad Shah himself set out on his return journey, we do not hear of Ala Singh plundering the great conqueror. But it is clear that at this stage of his career, he was certainly anti-Afghan. He must have joined the Sikh army that suffered the terrible disaster at *Ghallughara*. At Sirhind, Ahmad Shah turned his attention to the subjugation of the refractory Patiala chieftain. He wanted to attack Ala Singh in the stronghold. "He hastened over 80 *kos*, and arrived there in the course of two nights and one day. Ala fled away, after evacuating the fort."⁸ He, however, thought it prudent to submit. Ala Singh was taken to Lahore, a tribute of four lakhs was promised and three lakhs was actually paid.⁹ Not only was Ala Singh released, but it is said that

⁷ S. P. D., Vol. XXI, No. 116, dated 26th April 1757.
S. P. D., Vol. XXVII, No. 148, dated 5th April 1757.

⁸ Najibnama, p. 57 (a), date wrong. Rajwade, p. 382, 465.

⁹ Panth Prakash, p. 660 ; date wrong.

Abdali also gave him a dress of honour and the title of Raja.¹⁰

This very sensible moderation should be distinguished from the policy which he had pursued before. He wanted now skilfully to mingle war with diplomacy. As Cunningham notes : " The conqueror may not have been insensible to the policy of widening the difference between a Malwa and a Manjha Singh." ¹¹ He thus followed the same policy that Alexander pursued in his relations with Poros and Ambhi and he thus anticipated the same policy that the British followed later to prevent Ranjit Singh from absorbing the Cis-Sutlej Sikhs. To use an analogy from the history of Europe, he pursued almost the same line of action as did Alexander Farnesse, Duke of Parma, when he wanted to separate the Southern provinces from the northern in the Dutch war of independence. But here we must use a word of caution. Ala Singh should not be lightly branded as a traitor to the Sikh cause. We have no reason

¹⁰ Patiala mint is said to have been established in 1763, with the name of Ahmad Shah as the Padshah.—Lepel Griffin, Punjab Rajas, pp. 313, 314 footnote.

¹¹ Cunningham, History of the Sikhs, p. 102.

to think that his submission was anything more than bowing before a storm. He had certainly no intention of paying the promised tribute regularly as a dutiful subject of the Durrani ruler. His submission provided him with a convenient way out of his present difficulties and possibly placed him in a position of advantage over some of his rivals. We must not forget that 37 years later, Ranjit Singh also submitted to a grandson of Ahmad Shah and that submission only helped him in raising the structure of Sikh monarchy.¹² Unfortunately for Ala Singh, his own death in 1765,

¹² From the British records we can form some idea of the flutter which his submission caused. In view of the fact that Ranjit Singh's later career was so conspicuously anti-Afghan, the following extracts taken from secret proceedings of 1800 will appear significant.

21st April—No. 107—"Ranjit Singh has lately delivered to Zeman Shah's Vakil 15 pieces of cannon which the Durrani Prince lost last year in his retreat."

24th April, No. 73—"Ranjit Singh is ambitious of acquiring still greater authority which he may flatter himself with obtaining by means of a close connection with the Shah."

22nd May, No. 33—"I shall despatch Mir Beg Ali to Ranjit Singh with suitable instructions impressing that chief with a just sense of the dangers to which he would expose the interest of himself and of his nation by yielding to the insidious proposal of the Durrani Prince."

and that of his very able grandson, in the prime of his life, prevented the performance of any deed of a nobler note that might have been regarded as an expiation for the original sin of submission.

Before returning to Afghanistan, Ahmad Shah placed Saadat Khan in the Jalandhar Doab. Bikhani Khan remained in Maler Kotla and Zain Khan in Sirhind. A Hindu, Kabuli Mal, was appointed in Lahore. As the Sikhs had desecrated many mosques, the Moslems in a spirit of revenge razed Amritsar to the ground and with its ruins the sacred tank was filled up and pyramids of Sikh heads, a usual accompaniment of Afghan expeditions were once again to be seen. The mosques defiled by the Sikhs were washed with their blood.¹³ In this expedition, Ahmad Shah also reconquered Kashmir from his governor Sukh Jiwan, who had not remitted any tribute to Kabul for a long time. With the assistance of the Raja of Jammu, the expeditionary army could reach Kashmir. Jiwan was taken prisoner and Nuruddin was appointed there.¹⁴ Even before Ahmad Shah's departure, while he

¹³ Forster, Travels, Vol. I, p. 278.

¹⁴ Siyar, IV. pp. 4, 5 ; Rajwade, Vol. VI, p. 384.

was yet in Lahore, the Sikhs created difficulties for Zain Khan in Sirhind. Zain Khan had to buy them off by paying Rs. 50,000 cash down. But he treacherously made an attempt to loot their rear, whereupon they turned back, plundered his Dewan Lakshmi Narayan and compelled him to fight a battle at Harnulgarh, 15 kos from Sirhind.¹⁵

But immediately after the departure of Ahmad Shah Abdali, towards the close of 1762, it was apparent that this attempt to conciliate one section and repress another was an utter failure. When Ahmad Shah returned to Afghanistan, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, along with Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, Jai Singh Kanheya, Tara Singh Gheba and others, invaded Kasur, killed 400 Afghans, plundered the town and burnt it. It is said that the booty that fell to the lot of Tara Singh Gheba was alone worth 4 lakhs. "The loot of Kasur formed the financial basis of the Sardari of many Sikh chiefs."¹⁶ The Sikhs drove out Saadat Khan, governor of Jalandhar Doab, invaded Maler Kotla,

¹⁵ Rajwade, Vol. VI, p. 384.

¹⁶ Islamic Culture, July, 1929.

defeated and killed its chief, and next attacked Zain Khan, defeated and killed him.¹⁷ They plundered and destroyed Sirhind, accursed in Sikh eyes as the place where the sons of Guru Gobind Singh had been slain by the Moslems. Sikh depredations around Lahore and in the western Punjab brought Jahan Khan with a small army across the Attock. We learn from the Delhi Chronicle that he fought with the Sikhs and fled away. Timur Shah speaks of this engagement in greater detail. The fight took place near Lahore. Jahan Khan on horseback chased the Sikhs for about 15 *kos* and then came back. But the Sikhs returned to the fight. They were reinforced by 10,000 Sikh sowars under Chharat Singh, Lehna Singh, Gujar Singh, Jhanda Singh, Tara Singh Gheba, Jassa Singh Thoka, Hari Singh and others. The Durrani unable to cope with the Sikhs, retreated at night towards the town. The Sikhs made 200 Durrani captive. Jahan Khan retreated towards Kabul. It was after this engagement that the Sikhs turned upon Zain Khan.¹⁸ The Sikhs did

¹⁷ Khalsanama, p. 33.

¹⁸ Delhi Chronicle, 11th Dec., 1763. Hakikat. p. 33. Umdat-ut-Tawarikh, I, p. 279.

not actually occupy Lahore at this stage though they compelled Kabuli Mal, its governor, to pay them a large sum of money and to cut off the noses and ears of the cow-killing butchers of Lahore. They now dominated the scene and naturally revenged themselves upon the Muhammadans by pulling down mosques and compelling "Afghans in chains to wash their foundations with the blood of hogs."¹⁹ The sacred tank was re-excavated. It is, however, pleasant to hear on the testimony of Forster that the Sikhs "set a bound to the impulse of revenge and though the Afghan massacre and persecution must have been deeply imprinted on their minds, they did not, it is said, destroy one prisoner in cold blood."

Ala Singh of Patiala was regarded by the Sikhs with distrust and suspicion, and it was not certainly unnatural that they should think of him as a betrayer of the Sikh cause and a friend of the Durranis. They were ready to turn upon him for this treachery, and were only dissuaded by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. But Ala Singh had to join the confederate army in its attack on Sirhind

¹⁹ Forster, Travels, Vol. I, p. 279.

in order to prove that he was not really serving the interests of the Durranis. After the sack and destruction of Sirhind, Ala Singh is said to have purchased its ruined site from Bhai Budh Singh to whom this had been assigned.

Ahmed Shah Abdali invaded the Punjab for the seventh time in March, 1764.²⁰ But on account of a rebellion in Qandahar he was in such a hurry to depart that he could not devote his time and attention to the task of subjugating the Sikhs. The Sikhs are said to have gathered an army of about a lakh (the number must have been exaggerated) to fight Ahmad Shah and obstruct his passage. As he was in a hurry to go back, he sent a wakil to them to negotiate, but the infuriated Sikhs did not agree to the proposal of the envoy, insulted him and drove him out. On hearing this Ahmad Shah became very angry and came to Amritsar. Nobody dared meet him on the way. At Amritsar the Sikhs with drawn swords fell on the Durranis. Fighting ensued. The soldiers of both the armies got tired as it was very hot in March and they returned to their respective camps.

²⁰ S. P. D., XXIX, No. 55.

Ahmad Shah was not inclined to renew the fight and thus delay his departure. He retreated towards the Indus and returned to Qandahar.²¹

Forster assigns an earlier date, October 1762, to this engagement²² about which there seems to be not a little conflict of opinion amongst historians and chroniclers. But the Khalsanama assigns this event to the expedition of 1764. The British records vaguely refer to some such incident but in 1764 "Raja Dulab Ram" reported the rumour of the defeat of Abdali by the Sikhs in a letter, dated April 23, 1764.²³ The Sikh tradition of a victory over the Durrani army, as referred to by Forster, is most probably confused with Jahan Khan's defeat in 1763. Browne supports the tradition, as recorded in the Khalsanama, that a Sikh-Durrani engagement took place, but his date also seems to be 1765: "The battle was long and bloody and the loss so great on both sides that at length both armies drew off to their respective camps: neither party was inclined to renew the conflict and the Shah resumed the

²¹ Khalsanama, p. 34.

²² Forster's Travels, p. 279.

²³ C. P. C. I., No. 2174.

march without further interruption.”²⁴ It appears however, that the vague reference in the Calendar of Persian Correspondence points to the right date. We must confess that we are in the unenviable position having to deal with a clouded fact to which are assigned three dates, 1762, 1764, and 1765.

The Durrani could claim the victory as they advanced unmolested. Ahmad Shah from whom the Sikhs suffered so much would not certainly have been allowed to continue his return march, if the Sikhs could have helped it. Moreover, it does not seem probable that Ahmad Shah would negotiate with a militant anti-Afghan Sikh army. By the furthest stretch of imagination and in view of “the series of successes which conspicuously in India accompanied the Afghan army,” the redoubtable warrior cannot certainly be thought of having stooped so low as to negotiate for a retreat with the army of the Sikhs. But even if the fight was almost a drawn one, it shows how much Sikh power had increased within two years after the *great Ghallughara*. The Sikhs

²⁴ Browne, *India Tracts*, p. 26.

returned from their fight to Lahore. Kabuli Mal fled to Jammu. They made trenches around the fort, arrested the nephew of Kabuli Mal and occupied Lahore. The city was parcelled into three lots. The southern part up to Niaz Beg was given to Sobha Singh, the *haveli* of Kabuli Mal was given to Gujar Singh, the interior of the fort was given to Lahna Singh.²⁵ The triumphant Sikhs congregated in Amritsar and here they struck the first coins of good, almost pure silver with the inscription "Degh, Tegh Fateh." Thus was publicly proclaimed the establishment of Sikh sovereignty.

Towards the beginning of 1765, Najib-ud-Daula was besieged in the Imperial capital by Jawahir Singh, son of Suraj Mal, who was aided by the Sikhs and the Marathas. Najib sent frantic appeals to Abdali, who wrote to inform him that he was coming with his Uzbek troops and thirty thousand horse under Nasir Khan. But the news of his approach was sufficient to induce his enemies to raise the siege. By forced marches, Ahmad Shah reached Sirhind and the maidan of

²⁵ Umdat-ut-Tawarikh, Vol. I, p. 163.

Mustafabad, 60 Kos from Delhi. Here he learnt that Najib had made peace and that the infidels for whose slaughter he was so very keen were all gone. Thus foiled, he turned back and began his march towards Qandahar. He reached Lahore, by regular marches in ten days, crossed the Attock and went towards Kabul and Qandahar.²⁶ It should be noted, however, that it was most probably in this expedition that Ala Singh, on the recommendation of Shah Wali Khan, was confirmed as the Chakladar of Sirhind.²⁷ Thus, here the policy of conciliation, for the first time thought of in 1762, was continued. For this reason, the main body of the Sikhs looked with distrust upon this man whom the Durrani chief invariably made friends with. Shortly after Ala Singh's death, Sikh bands actually invaded Patiala territory and Najib-ud-Daulah who was the Indian agent of Abdali, advanced from Kurukshetra to Mustafabad to help him.²⁸

The Sikhs were free for about two years. In 1767, Ahmad Shah invaded India for the last time.

²⁶ Nuruddin, p. 92.

²⁷ Khalsanama, p. 34.

²⁸ S. P. D., XXVII, No. 133.

This time the Sikhs did not fly in a body to the mountains and forests, but with a large part of the army adopted very effective hovering and harassing tactics. The measures taken by the Durrani invader to thwart the Sikhs proved futile. He levied a contribution of one lakh and a half rupees from the zamindars of Aurangabad, Pasrur, Gujrat and Sialkot, "owing to several Sikhs being concealed in the neighbouring villages." They "engaged not to give protection to the Sikhs and should a Sikh fall into their hands to send him to the Shah to undergo condign punishment."²⁹ On his approach the conjoint rulers of Lahore fled either to Kasur or to the South towards Multan. Under the guidance of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, the Sikhs, with an army of forty thousand, divided into three detachments, hovered round the Shah but made no attempt to come to a close engagement.³⁰ However much he tried to tempt them into an engagement, he did not succeed. They always kept at a distance of 10/15 Kos from him. He even wrote to Jassa Singh Kalal and other Sikh Sardars to the effect that "if they were desirous

²⁹ C.P.C., XXIX, No. 99.

³⁰ C.P.C., No. 36, 1767.

of entering his service, they should come and join him." We can illustrate the effectiveness of Sikh tactics from one instance. On the 17th January, 1767, Jahan Khan with several thousand horse went out to plunder and reached the neighbourhood of Amritsar. Here the Sikhs engaged him and after three or four hours' fight, killed many of the Durranis, and even wounded Jahan Khan who retreated. On receiving the news, Ahmad Shah came to his rescue, fell upon the Sikhs and sent them flying towards Lahore. In the meantime, some of the Sikhs attacked his baggage and Nasir Khan Baluch, who was in charge of it, had great difficulty in driving them away.³¹ The policy of conciliation, which had originated with Shah Wali Khan, the wazir, was never lost sight of. Gujar Singh and Latta Singh were introduced to the Shah by the wazir. They were given Jagirs and taken into service. Jassa Singh Kalal, the great Sikh leader, retired wounded to a village, whose zamindar represented to him that the village would be plundered on his account. At this he retreated towards the jungles. The Sikhs, worsted

³¹ *Ibid*, No. 50.

a detachment under Nasir Khan, besides plundering 300 camels which laden with fruits from Kabul, were on their way to the Durrani camp. When Abdali began his advance towards Delhi, they plundered his baggage near Lahore and pressed so hard his brother-in-law, who was with his family in the fort, that he had to appeal to Ahmad Shah to come back to his rescue and the Durrani chief had actually to march back, whereupon they retreated. The Sikhs could carry out this plan of operations with such success because the zamindars were in general so friendly to them that it was their practice to go in the night to the village and get refreshments there and in the day to come out and harass the Durrani troops.³² The furthest advance of Ahmad Shah Abdali in this expedition was within five days' march of Delhi. Najib-ud-Daula came to see him at Ismailabad. In the Cis-Sutlej region also Ahmad Shah lost no opportunity of arresting the Sikhs who had taken refuge in places supposed to be inaccessible. Many Sikhs were made captive in the hills of Mani Majra. A *Chapawal* or fighting raid had to

be made in the territory of Najib because the Sikhs had taken advantage of his absence in the Durrani camp to plunder his territory. Jahan Khan, with Zabita Khan, Najib's son, took part in this fighting raid.³³ It was proposed to make Zabita Khan the fouzdar of Sirhind but the advice of Shah Wali Khan prevailed and Amar Singh, grandson of Ala Singh, was entrusted with the district, with the title of Raja-i-Rajgan. Thus the policy of *divide et impera*, continued under the advice of the astute wazir. It is said of course that the widow of Ala Singh had heavily bribed the wazir in order to induce him to take up the cause of her grandson.³⁴

Abdali now turned back. Some of his own soldiers mutinied, because they had not got their pay for a long time and could not get sufficient plunder in this expedition. They left for Afghanistan in defiance of the order of this great commander, before whom they had at one time trembled. With a consciousness of his ultimate failure, he also commenced his retreat back to Afghanistan. This was his last expedition. As soon as he turned

³³ Nur., 111, 112.

³⁴ Husain Shahi, p. 19.

war against the Spanish insurgents. These are very weighty words applicable also to the Sikh uprising against Durrani dominion in the Punjab. Ahmad Shah Abdali could not spare a sufficient number of soldiers in the Punjab to prevent the Sikhs from recovering their possessions and power. Naturally, therefore, he stationed his lieutenants in important strategic positions like Gujrat, Rohtas, Lahore, Sirhind and Multan. But the number of soldiers placed under them was hopelessly inadequate to hold even the ground on which they stood. Moreover, none of his lieutenants in the Punjab, seemed to possess the two primary virtues of tact and resourcefulness that go so much to make a successful administrator. His son, Timur Shah, was for one year his governor in the Punjab. But like Joseph Bonaparte in Spain, he was lamentably unfit for the part he was to play against a national opposition so baffling, so elusive and so wearing. Jahan Khan was no doubt a brilliant cavalry leader, but he was equally the most tactless of administrators. The rapidity with which he antagonised Adina Beg and the Sikhs, prove the truth of this statement. Another lieutenant of the Afghan king, Zain

Khan, later stationed in Sirhind, was dishonest and parsimonious and he alienated even the soldiery under him, by not paying them. As Ahmad Shah could not spare a sufficient number of troops to watch over his interests in the Punjab, he should have attempted to create a party in his favour that would be sufficiently strong by itself. But with characteristic shortsightedness, he relied at first only on the terror of his name and the might of his arms. Every time he came, he left terrible monuments of his vengeance. But it is a well-known fact that oppression strengthens the oppressed. Sikh courage remained unimpaired while Sikh resentment increased. He had possibly neither the time nor the resources to enable him to begin, much less to persevere, in a successful drive against the Sikhs in their mountain retreats, as Mir Mannu had at one time attempted. The policy of *divide et impera*, conciliating one section and repressing another, taking advantage of the differences and discords, was begun by him a decade too late. The attempts to drive in a wedge between the Manjha and Malwa Sikhs, was made by him only when the first policy had failed and the Afghan empire in India was in its last gasp.

An individual, however gifted, however great, is always at a disadvantage in fighting with a nation in arms, fired by a consciousness of its own destiny. Rogers thinks that the success of the Sikhs can be accounted for by four causes—religiousness, quaintness, spirit of self-denial and an open house. It must further be admitted that “of the two great soldierly virtues, constancy in disaster and hopefulness in defeat, no people striving for independence, ever possessed a larger share.” Moreover, Abdali’s method of warfare defeated its own purpose. It enabled the Sikhs to organise war by means of war. On many occasions, when Timur Shah, the son and successor of Ahmad Shah, was pressed by his courtiers to invade the Punjab, he would remark—“what benefit did father derive from his Indian expeditions. These expeditions were, on the other hand, responsible for the prosperity of the Sikhs.”³⁸ The Sikhs knew quite well how to avert the consequences of a defeat and how to turn victories to good account. The Sikh *dal* or army of the theocracy, as organised by

³⁸ Umdat-ut-Tawarikh, I, p. 166.

Kapur Singh and Jassa Singh Kalal, became a great instrument for the assertion of the supremacy of the Khalsa. It showed a terrible vitality, and grew into a mighty tide. It arrived through a series of reverses at a complete victory.

Ahmad Shah is said to have remarked that it would be necessary for the complete reduction of Sikh power to wait until their religious fervour had evaporated. As yet the Sikh community as a body-politic was without an element of decay. As a warrior nation, they presented an almost united front, the lapse on the part of the house of Patiala, of course, excepted. As Ranade remarks in connection with the Maratha war of independence, "mere freebooters and plunderers never could have obtained success in such a war against such a foe. It was a higher moral force which brought out all the virtues of the best men of the nation." This statement is true of the Sikh nation as well. Security of the western Afghan frontier was absolutely necessary, if Ahmad Shah was to succeed against the Sikhs. But his western frontier was insecure and there were frequent rebellions in Afghanistan that often diverted his attention from the east. His

empire extended "from the west of Khorasan to Sirhind and from the Oxus to the sea." Herat, Nishapur, the remoter parts of Khorasan, Meshed and other regions, constantly demanded his attention. In 1752, there was a rebellion of the nephew of Ahmad Shah as also of the Khilijis. In 1756, there were disturbances in the direction of Persia and Turkestan. In 1758, there was a rebellion in Baluchistan. In 1763, there was an insurrection in Qandahar, another in Herat. In 1768, there was a great rebellion in Khorasan, occasioned by Nasirullah Mirza. Most of the Persian chiefs took part in it and a great battle had to be fought at Meshed. These ever-recurring disturbances prevented Ahmad Shah from giving undivided attention to the Sikh people.

For the successful termination of the Sikh war of independence, we should give the credit to the entire nation, not to any individual. That would be against the spirit of the whole enterprise. But an exception must be made in favour of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. To a large extent, he was the soul of many of those apparently isolated undertakings that ultimately brought the war of liberation to a successful termination. The *Sarbut*

Khalsa would invariably nominate him as the commander in all its combined undertakings. But his ascendancy was precisely that which superior minds acquire in times of difficulty. No badge distinguished him from the common soldiers. The Sikh horseman recognised his general in the most handsome tall figure and by the fact that he surpassed every one of his men in temperance as well as in toil, in valour as also in conduct. He was more than anything else a religious man and the greatest Sikh chieftains like Amar Singh of Patiala would consider it an honour to be initiated by him. His firmness was allied to his piety and it never made him falter in his determination to resist. Retreat was ever open to him : but he never succumbed to the temptation to which Ala Singh was a victim. In 1767, Ahmad Shah made a special effort to win him over, and it is a certainty that at any stage of the struggle the Durrani chief would have been only too glad not only to pardon him but also to grant him lands and titles as he had done in the case of the Patiala chieftain. But he never faltered. What further raised him above others, was the utter absence of jealousy in his mind. He was a whole-souled

patriot and yet for the sake of unity he would at times tolerate the lapses of others. Ala Singh was very jealous of him, but after Ala Singh's submission to the Durrani chief, it was Jassa Singh Ahluwalia's persuasions that ultimately prevented the Sikhs from falling upon the Patiala chieftain and they agreed to spare him on his joining the Sikh army in its attack on Sirhind. His career, a romantic alternation of victories and escapes, his courage and patriotism, a theme of admiration and emulation, his moral qualities and most conspicuously his piety, a support and consolation even in the darkest hour, he was like the legendary British knight, who could say in the language of the poet—

“ My good blade carves the casques of men
My tough lance thrusteth sure;
My strength is as the strength of ten
Because my heart is pure.”

CHAPTER V

De facto SIKH SOVEREIGNTY—FEEBLE AFGHAN OPPOSITION

The sovereignty of the Sikhs was practically established in the Punjab. They also asserted *de jure* authority, although this clashed with the Afghan claim. In those days no assertion of authority could be held as valid unless it was accompanied by an issue of coins. As Whitehead writes—"Unquestionably in the state of civilization here obtaining the production and facile dispersion of a new royal device, was singularly well adopted to make manifest to the comprehension of all classes, the immediate change in the supreme royal power. In places where men did not print, these stamped moneys obtruding into every bazar, constituted the most effective manifestoes and proclamations human ingenuity could have devised."¹

¹ Whitehead, Catalogue of Coins in the Lahore Museum, Vol. III, Introduction.

The Sikhs are said to have struck coins for the first time in 1758, after the expulsion of Timur Shah and Jahan Khan. These coins bore the following inscription :—“ Coined by the grace of Khalsaji in the country of Ahmad, conquered by Jassa Singh Kalal.”² But no such coin has survived and it has been suggested that these coins were struck at a later period by qazis and mullahs and sent to Ahmad Shah in order to incite him to fall upon the Sikhs for this open insult to his authority. The idea that Jassa Singh Ahluwalia imprinted on the coins of Khalsa the inscription—“ Mulke Ahmad giraft Jassa Kalal ” is highly absurd and absolutely unlikely. Even Ranjit Singh in the plenitude of his power, never left the impress of his name on the coins. The theocratic zeal and the democratic spirit were far too deep-rooted to allow any individual to do such a highly objectionable thing. Sikh democracy was such a living force in those days of Sikh struggle against the Durrani that no Sikh, however highly placed, would dare flout the Khalsa in such a way. Lastly, Jassa

² Browne, *India Tracts*, II, p. 19.

Malcolm, *Sketch*, p. 95.

Singh Ahluwalia, that ideal democratic leader, conspicuous for his spirit of self-sacrifice, was too faithful a follower of the commonwealth and too whole-souled a patriot to attempt to distinguish himself in a way so revolting to a Sikh.

The Sikh Commonwealth really struck coins for the first time in 1764, with the inscription—

“Dekh O Tegh O Fateh O Nusrat-i-bedirang.

Yaft az Nanak Guru Gobind Singh.”

Kettle (symbol of feeding the poor), sword (symbol of power), victory and unhesitating patronage, Guru Gobind Singh obtained from Nanak.

Gobind Shahi coins of this type have been found from 1822 Samvat to 1834 Samvat with an interruption in 1823-24 Samvat, caused by Ahmad Shah's last descent on India. In 1835 Samvat, *i.e.*, 1778 A.D., we find Nanak Shahi coins with a different inscription which can be translated thus—“the man of victory obtained by the exertion of Guru Gobind Singh and the grace of king Nanak, struck this coin in each of the two worlds.” In a coin of th

Sikhs formed themselves into misls or confederacies. Twelve misls were formed :—

The Bhangi Misl.—Of this misl, the founder was Chhaja Singh of Panjwar.⁵ But the misl emerges from obscurity into the full view of history under Hari Singh. He was succeeded by Jhanda Singh.⁶ After him came Ganda Singh. The strength of this misl has been variously estimated between 10,000 and 20,000 horse. Even before 1767, Hari Singh established his headquarters at Gilwali in Amritsar district and extended his power up to Chiniot and Jhang. Rawalpindi was conquered by Milka Singh Thepuria and Jammu was made tributary, although Ranjit Deo continued to have coins struck

⁵ Panth Prakash, p. 595.

⁶ He even wrote a letter to General Barker, referring to the awe which the Dal khalsa inspired, thus preventing Ahmad Shah Abdali from crossing the Attock. He further wrote that Chait Singh and Ajit Singh of Ramgarh were dead and Ranjit Deo was an intimate friend. Thus he supplied news to the British, with a view of course to impress on them the strength of his own position and that of the Sikhs.—C. P. C., August 19, 1771, No. 868. It is something to the credit of this Trans-Sutlej Sikh chieftain that he could look beyond his narrow circle and cultivate the goodwill of foreigners.

1841 Samvat or 1784 A.D., occurs the word "ahad" which, if we follow the Mughai precedent, means the beginning of a new government. What new ascendancy can it refer to? Rodgers suggests the ascendancy of Maha Singh only to brush aside his theory himself. There is no means to shed any new light on this point.³

Sikh sway was thus firmly established in the Punjab as the uninterrupted issue of their coins indicates. Between 1767-'73 the Sikhs practically extended their power from Saharanpur in the east to Attock in the west, from Multan in the south to Kangra and Jammu in the north. Timur Shah, the successor of Ahmad Shah, was a peaceful man.⁴ He abandoned his father's policy of attempting to subdue the Sikhs. The

³ J. A. S. B., 1881, Part I, p. 71: "On the Coins of the Sikhs."—C. J. Rodgers.

⁴ British records—Foreign, Secret and Political proceed-

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in the name of his nominal sovereign Shah Alam II.⁷ Hari Singh is even said to have attempted to penetrate into Kashmir but failed. Jhanda Singh turned his attention to Multan which was in the hands of the Afghans, who had come earlier in the train of Ahmad Shah Abdali. The Afghans of Multan were naturally helped by the Daudputras of Bahawalpur. In the first instance, after some fighting, Pakpattan was fixed as the boundary by mutual agreement. But as was only to be expected, the Afghans of Multan found themselves attacked for the second time by this aggressive misl. But the Bhangis could not take the place even in their second attempt. This was only natural, for the Sikhs had practically no artillery and they could not have been adequately equipped with siege trains. Jhanda Singh succeeded in his third attempt because he was this time fortunate enough to get the support of a disaffected party in Multan. It was conquered and annexed.⁸ They also conquered Kasur. In 1770, the Bhangi

⁷ Rawalpindi District Gazetteer and J. A.S B, 1885. Rogers, Some Coins of Ranjit Deo.

⁸ Hakikat, p. 36.

Sardars, Jhanda Singh and Ganda Singh, killed one of the Kasur chiefs and captured the fortified hamlets. "The territory was divided among the various chiefs, Kot Khwaja Husain fell to the lot of Golab Singh Bhangi who after appointing his officials left the town for Amritsar.⁹ The rule of the Bhangis extended in 1773 from Lahore and Amritsar up to Multan in the south, Gujrat in the North-west and Jammu in the north. Lahore was occupied by three Bhangi chieftains, Lehna Singh, Gujar Singh and Shova Singh, as early as 1765.¹⁰ Sardar Gujar Singh had also marched that very year against Mukarrab Khan, whose power extended from the Chenab to the Indus. Mukarrab Khan was defeated and gave up his possessions in the Doab between the Jhelum and the Chenab. He made his headquarters at Gujrat. His power even extended up to the Salt Range. He conquered Rohtas with the help of Chharat Singh Sukerchakia, with whom he divided the upper Punjab."¹¹ Under Hari Singh, Jhanda

⁹ Islamic Culture, July, 1929 (Sairistan, 14).

¹⁰ Umdat-ut-Tawarikh, p. 163.

¹¹ Punjab Gazetteer, Gujrat District.

Singh and Ganda Singh, the Bhangi misl was so powerful that the unification of the whole of the Punjab under its sway, appeared to be quite in the fitness of things but decline set in very rapidly and the confederacy was one of the earliest to be dissolved : it was absorbed by one of its fortunate rivals—the Sukerchakia misl.

The Ahluwalia Misl.—Its real founder was Jassa Singh Kalal, the leader of the Khalsa in its struggle for independence against the Durranis. He established his own sway in the Jalandhar Doab and made Kapurthala his headquarters. The strength of this misl is estimated at 3,000 horse.

The Fyzullapur Misl.—Was founded by Kapur Singh, who led the Sikhs in the struggle for independence against the decadent Mughal empire. This misl's strength was estimated at about 2,500 horse. (He had quite early in his career seized the village of Fyzullapur which lent its name to the misl.)

The Ramgarhia Misl.—The real founder of this misl was Jassa Singh *Thoka*. He had during the war of liberation served for some time under Adina Beg. He then came to his compatriots but again took service under the Moslems. Thus he did not

by any means play a very noble part during the earlier period of the war of liberation with the Durranis. But late in course of the struggle, this undoubtedly able man served the commonwealth whole-heartedly, and was responsible, along with Jai Singh Kanheya, for the defeat of Khwaja Abid Khan. He restored Ram Rouni and conquered Batala, Kalanaur. A Sikh tradition very well illustrates how in the days of adversity his self-seeking instinct would sometimes be overpowered by the commonwealth. During the viceroyalty of Mir Mannu, the fort of Ram Rouni was once besieged by the Muhammadans. Expelled from the Sikh ranks on a charge of infanticide, Jassa Singh Thoka had joined Adina Beg and was in the ranks of the besiegers. But the war cries of his hardpressed comrades within the fort aroused all his nobler instincts and he wrote a letter, asking for forgiveness and expressing a desire to join the besieged. He attached the letter to an arrow and dropped it within the fort. In reply he was pardoned and permitted to join the besieged.¹³ This is a tradition that well illustrates the nature of the

¹³ Panth Prakash, p. 515.

Sikh struggle for independence. As soon as the common danger was gone, the self-seeking instinct of Jassa Singh asserted itself. He was the type of the self-seeking, fierce Sikh baron of this period (1767-'79). He was in possession of Batala and Kalanaur. Later, in the course of a struggle with the Kanheyas he was expelled from his possessions and had to pursue the career of a daring freebooter in the Cis-Sutlej region. He carried on his plundering raids even into the heart of the Doab between the Ganges and the Jumna. In conjunction with Maha Singh, the Sukerchakia chieftain, he succeeded in recovering a part of his possessions from the Kanheyas. This misl's strength has been estimated at 3,000 horse.

The Kanheya Misl.—Its chief was Jai Singh. He came into prominence in the later years of Ahmad Shah Abdali. In alliance with Chharat Singh of the Sukerchakia Misl, he fought with Jhanda Singh on the banks of the Basantar river near Jammu. Chharat Singh died as a result of the bursting of a matchlock and it is said Jai Singh had Jhanda Singh assassinated. Jai Singh next ousted Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and annexed his possessions. He also acquired a great ascen-

dancy over the hill rajas. But when the expelled Ramgarhia chieftain and Chharat Singh's son, Maha Singh, joined in an alliance with Sansar Chand of Katoch, Jai Singh was defeated and his son, Gurbaksh Singh, was slain. Most of the possessions of Jassa Sing Ramgarhia had to be restored. This misl entered upon its period of decline.

The Sukerchakia Misl.—Was founded by Chharat Singh. It immediately came into prominence under him and its power steadily increased under his son, Maha Singh, who might have anticipated Ranjit Singh if he had not died prematurely.

The Nakkai Misl.—Was established in the country south-west of Lahore bordering on Multan. About the year 1773, its chief was Ran Singh under whom the misl reached the zenith of its power.

The Dalewalia Misl.—Derived its name from the village Dalewal on the Ravi. Its most prominent chief at one time was Tara Singh Gheba. The troops under his control numbered about 7,500.

The Karora Singhia Misl.—This misl had its territories in the Cis-Sutlej region as also in the Jalandhar Doab. It was headed first by Karora

Singh and after him by Baghail Singh. He was a chief of much consequence.

The *Shahid* and *Nihang Misl*.—Lay in the *Cis-Sutlej* region. Its strength is estimated at 2,000. The *Nishanwalas* were the standard-bearers of the *Dal Khalsa* and had their headquarters at *Ambala*. Their strength at one time was very considerable—12,000 according to *Murray*. But this appears to be doubtful.

The *Phulkias* of *Patiala*, *Nabha*, *Jhind* and *Kythal*, formed the most important *Cis-Sutlej* *misl* in its different branches. Of the *Patiala* chief *Amar Singh*, it has been said that he had always “six or seven thousand *sowar* under him and *piyadha* in any number, 5 or 6 strong forts and a collection of forty lakhs of rupees.”¹⁴

Browne gives the following list of *Sikh Sardars* with the places of their residence and the number of their forces :—

Place of Residence.	Names of Sardars.	Horse.	Foot.
<i>Karnwal</i> (<i>Karnal</i>)	<i>Raja Gudgput Singh</i>	1,500	500
<i>Taunasar</i> (<i>Thanesar</i>)	<i>Bang Singh, Bamba Singh.</i>	750	250

Place of Residence.	Names of Sardars.	Horse.	Foot.
Shawbad (Shahbad)	Curram Singh Ner-mullah.	750	250
Ambala	Gurdit Singh	750	250
Sirhind	Jassa Singh (Thoka)	1,500	500
Conna Serai (Khanna, 26 miles south-east of Ludhiana).	Sonde Singh	225	75
Pail Serai (Pail, 18 miles south-east of Ludhiana).	Hari Singh Dulal	1,500	500
Buria	Hari Singh, Bung Singh.	750	250
Secundra (Sikandara in Ambala).	Dewan Singh Lung	750	250
Damala (25 miles east of Thanesar).	Dulcha Singh (Tulsa?)	750	250
Beloin (Bahain, 12 miles north-east of Ambala).	Gordit Singh	150	50
Gurry (Garhi Kotaha, 20 miles north-east of Ambala).	Hucumut Singh	150	50
Moni Majera (Mani Majra, 25 miles north of Ambala).	Buget Singh	375	125
Pehova (16 miles west of Thanesar).	Deesu Singh	1,125	375

Place of Residence.	Names of Sardars.	Horse.	Foot.
Kurra (Kharar? 25 miles north of Ambala).	Dunna Singh	1,500	500
Futteabad (Fateha-bad).	Raja Sahib Singh	4,500	1,500
Natta (Nabha)	Hamir Singh	600	200
		<hr/>	<hr/>
		18,225	6,057

TOTAL 24,300 in round numbers from the Jumna to the Sutlej.

Nurmehal (17 miles south of Jalandhar).	Bughel Singh	750	250
Necoder (16 miles south of Jalandhar).	Tara Singh Gaiba	2,250	750
Tute Serai ? (most probably a possession of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia).	Jassa Singh	3,000	1,000
Catta?	Tara Singh Caker	375	125
Chur Samgar (Garh Shamkar, 45 miles east of Jalandhar).	Cuseal Singh	150	50
Jeledur (may be Jalandhar).	Ma Singh	750	250
Capurthala (Kapur-thala).	Jessa Singh	3,000	1000
		<hr/>	<hr/>
		10,275	3425

TOTAL 13,700 Bist Jalandhar.

Place of Residence.	Names of Sardars.	Horse.	Foot.
Lahore	Guger Singh, Soba Singh, Lina Singh. =30,200 Bari Doab.	22,150	8,050
Shah Deru	Maha Singh =20,000 Rechna Doab.	15,000	5,000
Gujerat Shah Dowla	Guger Singh =10,000 Doab Jenhab and Sindsagar. ¹⁵	7,500	2,500

Apparently Browne's information about the chiefs in the region between the Jumna and the Sutlej or in the Jalandhar Doab is not likely to be very inaccurate. He was in Delhi in the royal court and the Ganges-Jumna Doab was almost every year plundered by the Cis-Sutlej chiefs or the *Budha Dal* from the Jalandhar Doab. At least, as he was not at a very great distance from the Sikhs in these regions, his estimate, though based on hearsay, can be accepted as fairly accurate, but about the Sikhs in the Bari, Rechna and Jech Doabs, his account is much too vague to be acceptable.

¹⁵ Browne, India Tracts.

Mr. Hari Ram Gupta of Dev Samaj High School, Lahore, has very kindly helped me to locate most of these places.

The Frenchman Bussy wrote a letter from Pondicherry in 1784 to Marshal de Castries, Royal Minister, in which he gives the name of two Sikh chiefs of great power and influence. He wrote—

“The Sikhs are masters of the country which lies between Delhi and the empire of Persia. They have formed a kind of republic of which the constitution is little known. They, however, recognise two leading chiefs—Jassa Singh, Jahar Shah Singh. The former possesses the provinces which lie between Multan and Delhi and made not long ago war with Timur Shah. The number of his troops appears to be one hundred thousand. Jahar Shah Singh commands all the country situated between Panipat and Lahore. He has been often up against the generals of the Emperor. They ascribe 60/80 thousand men to him.”¹⁶ It is clear that Bussy heard the name of Jassa Singh Kalal, but Jassa Singh's hold did not extend from Multan to Delhi and he never fought against Timur but against Ahmad Shah Abdali. Then

¹⁶ Modern Review, 1925. Letter No. 423 of the Pondicherry Catalogue, dated 3rd March, 1784.

again, we find it impossible to identify Jahar Shah Singh, apparently a leading Cis-Sutlej chief who had fought against the Emperor. He might have vaguely heard of the Sikhs in two groups but could not possibly know the actual line of demarcation, their respective fighting strength and the actual names of their leaders.

The details of the petty wars carried on by the misls with one another need not detain us. It will not be wrong to term these as "village warfare." The interest that attaches to them is purely local. Two of these misls, the Fyzulla-purias and the Ahluwalias, played a very important part in the Sikh war of liberation. But after the Sikhs had achieved their independence, the misls that came into prominence were the Bhangis, the Kanheyas and the Sukerchakias. The wars that the Sikh chiefs carried on with one another seem to resemble the struggle of the Heptarchic kingdoms after the Anglo-Saxon conquest. The Bhangis resemble the Northumbrians, the Kanheyas the Mercians and the Sukerchakias resemble the people of Wessex and the unification of England by the house of Wessex has its parallel in the work of the Sukerchakia misl, to which we

owe the unification of the whole of the Trans-Sutlej Punjab.

Here it may not be out of place to discuss the causes of the failure of the Bhangis to unify the Punjab, after they had begun their career in a blaze of glory. In the first place, when they began their ambitious career, Ahmad Shah was still to be reckoned with. When he disappeared from the stage of the Punjab politics, for some time, they carried everything before them and extended their power from Jammu to Multan. But Multan was in 1781 wrested from their hands by Timur Shah, the son and successor of Ahmad Shah. Forster asserts that the surrender of Multan to Timur Shah was pusillanimous, especially when we remember that Timur himself was neither very able nor very aggressive. But it was "a natural consequence of the eternal divisions, the fears entertained by the body at large of the increase of individual power."¹⁷ The unfortunate and premature deaths of Hari Singh, Jhanda Singh and Ganda Singh coming in quick succession, left the task of controlling the turbu-

¹⁷ Forster, Travels.

lent Bhangi Sardars in the hands of weaklings, infants and widows. The Sardars got out of control. Just about this time, arose other big leaders of other confederacies—Jai Singh Kanheya, Chharat Singh Sukerchakia, and after him his son, Maha Singh. The Bhangis began to lose all along the line. Chharat Singh and Maha Singh raised the power and prestige of their misl. Maha Singh died in 1792 and his boy-son, who succeeded him, was destined to establish the famous Sikh military monarchy.

Now that the Punjab was entirely under Sikh sway, the successors of Ahmad Shah would have shown more prudence, if they had accepted, without reserve, the established state of things. But history does not record that a decadent monarchy shows such wisdom. It cannot be denied that Timur Shah, to some extent, realized the weakness of his position but his successor Zeman Shah, with characteristic shortsightedness made repeated attempts to reconquer the Punjab and his utter failure was quite natural. Ahmad Shah Abdali failed to subdue the Sikhs: yet that failure had a dignity, a majesty which Zeman Shah's attempts lacked. When we read of Zeman Shah's failure,

it appears almost comical. It involuntarily occurs to the historian that Zeman Shah had no business to go beyond Attock into the Punjab.

In the reign of Timur Shah, the first incident of note that has anything to do with Sikh history, was the rebellion of Qazi Faizullah. He raised troops under the pretence of fighting the Sikhs. But he really wanted to put Timur to death.¹⁸ The plot failed and six thousand of the plotters were put to death. But the Sikhs were so aggressive that Timur Shah had resolved to teach them a lesson. He heard that the Sikhs even threatened Dera Ismail Khan and Dera Ghazi Khan.¹⁹ Timur Shah could not keep quiet any longer. He determined to conquer Multan from the Sikhs. The Yusufzai, Durrani, Qazilbashi and Mughal troops that were gathered for this purpose numbered 18,000. Zangi Khan Durrani was appointed Commander-in-Chief. Timur Shah told him to travel in such a way that no news of his movements could reach the Sikhs and thus taking them unawares, he should defeat them. The Afghan

¹⁸ Elphinstone, *Kabul*, II, Appendix, p. 303.
Husain Shahi, p. 22A.

¹⁹ Husain Shahi, p. 22.

army advanced by forced marches. Event ravel-
lers were not allowed to proceed, lest the news of
Afghan advance should reach the Sikhs. Zangi
Khan halted for the night at a distance of 8 *Kos*
from the Sikh camp. Even before daybreak, he
made a disposition of his troops. The Mughals and
the Qazilbashis were on the right, the Qandahar
Durrani were on the left. He himself led the
vanguard. At daybreak he fell upon them. They
were under the impression that Timur Shah with
his army, was in Peshawar, hundreds of miles off,
with mighty streams separating him from them.
Their false sense of security kept them inactive
and absolutely unprepared. But the Sikhs who
were essentially a fighting race, could not be so
easily overcome by a surprise attack. For several
hours a terrible fight went on. Many were slain
and many fled. It is said that about 2,000 were
drowned in the attempt to cross and 3,000 (not
30,000) are said to have been slain.²⁰ The number
has been undoubtedly exaggerated. Timur Shah
himself wrote that the Sikhs who were killed, did

²⁰ Husain Shahi, p. 24.

Tarikh i-Ahmad Shah, p. 21.

not number more than seven hundred.²¹ Thus the town was taken by a surprise assault. Very soon Timur Shah himself joined his army. Now the siege of the fort began. After terrible privations, the Sikhs in the fort capitulated and Timur Shah conferred the Subahdarship of Multan on Shuja Khan Suddozai.

The successful Multan expedition was undertaken in 1781. Timur Shah also attacked the Bahawalpur chief, who had stopped the payment of revenue to the Kabul monarchy. On hearing of Timur's approach, Bahawal Khan retired to a distant fort in the midst of a deserted sandy tract. The city of Bahawalpur was taken after a fight and there was some incendiarism and loot. Madat Khan with 2,000 troops and three days' provisions was sent against the Bahawalpur chief in his sandy retreat. By an accident, one of the cannon balls reached the magazine through an opening for sunlight. There was a great explosion. The whole fort was shaken to its base and a wall fell down. Bahawal Khan was arrested or, as others say, he marched by another route, reached Timur

²¹ Hakikat Bina, p. 40.

Shah and secured his pardon. It is no doubt significant that in the treaty that was signed between them, there was a clause that in case of a war between the Afghan king and the Sikhs of Lahore, the Bahawalpur chief would supply troops to his overlord.²²

Timur Shah also reduced the Talpur Amirs of Sindh to submission. They agreed to pay him a subsidy. Sardar Madat Khan had to be sent against them and Fateh Ali Khan was appointed the Afghan viceroy in Sindh. Kashmir also received his attention. After the death of Hazi Karim Dad Khan, Ahmad Shah's governor in Kashmir, his son, Ajad Khan, became the Subahdar in his father's place. He meditated rebellion, increased his army and what is undoubtedly of some significance, took in his service a band of Sikh soldiers. He then stopped the payment of tribute. Army after army had to be sent against him. In the frequent encounters between the Kabul army and the Kashmir army the Sikhs fought very bravely against the Afghans.

²² Husain Shahi, p. 25.

Tarikh-i-Ahmad Shah, p. 21.

Ultimately, however, Ajad Khan was overwhelmed and betrayed but he preferred suicide to falling in the hands of the Kabul commander. Kashmir was thus reconquered. The Khyber region was in the hands of Arslam Khan Mohmand. He had rebelled but was induced by a promise of safety to come to Timur Shah and was then put to death. Fateh Khan Yusufzai, a zamindar of Muzaffarabad was creating troubles. He was arrested and put to death.²³

Timur Shah's campaigns on the Indian borderland, in Kashmir, the Khyber region, Multan, Bahawalpur and Sindh and the details of the conquests have their significance. We should note that Timur Shah gave his attention to those regions in which the Moslems predominated and where combined Sikh aggression was not to be feared. His one great exploit against the Sikhs was the taking of Multan : otherwise he left them alone. The genesis of Fyzulla Khan's rebellion is no doubt to be sought in the permission accorded to Timur Shah to gather an army to fight the Sikhs. But beyond this and beyond occasional false alarms that

²³ Husain Shahi, pp. 29, 30, 31.

he was coming, there is no basis for the suggestion that he really wanted to reconquer the Punjab. If we search diligently through the British and the Maratha records we shall have ample evidence of false alarms²⁴ but these can well be ascribed to the Durrani tradition of frequent plundering raids, a tradition which Ahmad Shah Abdali's career had impressed on the Indian mind. No Indian could possibly believe that Timur Shah would go against this time-honoured tradition and be really pacifically inclined. Moreover, they heard only too often that Timur was fighting now in Multan, now in Sindh, now in Bahawalpur, the Khyber border land and Kashmir. They listened with great anxiety to the distant rumbling of the thunder and feared that the storm might burst upon them at any moment. But Timur did not come and for the best reasons. The Sikhs who had so sorely harassed his all-conquering father, would not certainly spare him. They might quarrel among themselves, but the presence of a foreign enemy would possibly reunite them. Timur therefore attempted to consolidate his sway in the regions

²⁴ Secret Proceedings, 17th January, 1786, No. 19. Delhi Yethil Raj Karnen, II, Letter No. 70.

not dominated by the Sikhs and this was certainly very wise. It has, however, been suggested that Mahadji Sindhia's career in Northern India and the well-organised, well-disciplined Maratha army in possession of Delhi, Agra and other regions towards the east and the west, might have been largely responsible for the Durrani disinclination to advance beyond the borderland. Keene writes, Madhava Rao's victory at Patna over Ismail Beg and over his Rathor allies at Mirtha had its repercussions elsewhere.....“The echo of this blow resounded far and wide. Timur Shah heard of it in the Khyber and held back his barbarian hordes longing for the loot of India.”²⁵ But between 1786-88, Timur Shah could have taken advantage of the temporary eclipse of Mahadji's power as a result of the defeats his army had suffered in the hands of the Rajputs and Ismail Beg. Timur was during these years recovering his power in Sindh, Bahawalpur and Kashmir but he made no attempt to take advantage of the defeats suffered by the Maratha army. Moreover Mahadji Sindhia, even in the plenitude of his power, would never have

²⁵ Keene, *Hindustan under Free Lances*, p. 51.

attempted to prevent him from reconquering the trans-Sutlej Punjab. The only legitimate conclusion is that he was disinclined to fight that vexatious and almost invisible adversary, the Sikh Khalsa.

But what he did not attempt himself, his son in the exuberance of his zeal, tried and thus failed in his dual role as an Afghan ruler as also as an Indian conqueror. Timur Shah died on the 20th May, 1793. His son Zeman Shah was selected as king. He was at that time only 23 years old. In his resolution to invade India, he was induced by Mirza Ahsan Bakht, a Delhi prince who had fled to Kabul during the reign of Timur.²⁶ In December, 1793, Zeman Shah marched to Peshawar with a view to invading India but he considered it more prudent to return to his Kabul dominion as his rule was not yet well-established. He most probably expected that by following a spirited foreign policy, he would be able to appeal to the martial instinct of the Afghan race and succeed in consolidating his authority in Afghanistan.

²⁶ Foreign Department, Secret and Political Consultation, No. 10, 6th September. Translation of a paper of intelligence from Kabul.

Delhi Yethil Raj Karnen, Vol. II, No. 102.

In the remaining months of 1793 and 1794, he reduced Kashmir, which had rebelled after the death of Timur. The Amirs of Sindh were also compelled to pay tribute. Then after settling the affairs at home, Zeman Shah started from Kabul, crossed near the ford of Attock, reached Hasan Abdal and made Rohtas, his headquarters. After some days' rest, Ahmad Khan Shahanchi, Bahadur Khan Muhammadzai, with 7,000 soldiers were sent to conquer the Doab between the Jhelum and the Chenab. Humayun Shah, the eldest brother of Zeman Shah who was a fugitive, dogged by ill-luck, reached Kasba-i-Leiah. Md. Khan Suddozai, the governor of that region, imprisoned him. He was blinded by the order of Zeman Shah and then sent to Kabul. Urgent letters came from Qandahar and Herat that Sultan Mahmud, a half-brother of Zeman Shah was creating troubles and wanted revenge for the treatment meted out to Humayun, and that the people of Herat had joined him.²⁷

²⁷ Husain Shahi, 37A, 37B.

Elphinstone, Account of Kabul, II, pp. 310, 311, 312. Date 1795—according to Elphinstone the precipitate retreat after a week's stay at Hasan Abdal was caused by the news of the invasion of west Khorasan by the king of Persia.

Zeman Shah had to postpone his Punjab exploits and start for Khorasan. The army of 7,000 *sowars* and some *piyadah fouj* that had been sent with Ahmad Khan and Bahadur Khan to the Jech Doab, had, in the meantime, started from the *padshahi* camp, crossed the Jhelum and had met the Sikhs on the other side of the river. Though the Sikhs began their trick flights, so usual with them, ultimately some of their Sardars massed their troops and, on the borders of Gujrat, at a place named Dulah, there was a severe fight between the combatants. Ahmad Khan showed great prowess but he saw that there was no union among the Durrani Sardars, and the Durrani soldiers were not very much inclined to fight. He gave up the hopes of victory,²⁸ retreated with great skill and re-crossed the Jhelum. This is of course a Moslem version of a Sikh-Afghan encounter. But even this shows that the Sikhs had the better of it.

Zeman Shah's next Indian invasion is dated 1796-'97. Mirza Ghulam Muhammad Khan came with a letter from Shah Alam II in which his own

²⁸ Husain Shahi, p. 37.

Tarikh-i-Ahmad Shahi, p. 33.

difficulties were enumerated and the help of an Ahmad Shah in the making, was sought. Zeman Shah referred to the fact that it was the summer season and that the Durrani could not bear the heat of Northern India. He would think of advancing to India after the season was over. The real reason for this delay was the commotion, created by Sultan Mahmud. Soon after Sultan Mahmud's submission Zeman Shah marched to Hindustan. From Kabul he advanced to Peshawar. There he halted and organized his expeditionary force. He appointed Hafiz Sher Md. Khan as Sipahsalar. His route was Hasan Abdal, Rawalpindi, Rohtas, Gujrat, Shah Dula, Gujranwala, Aminabad, Lahore.²⁹

Of this expedition in 1796-97, the British records supply us with a mass of information. From the Moslem chroniclers we learn that Sher Md. Khan had 20,000 soldiers with him, all Durrani.³⁰ The Sikhs, on hearing the news of Zeman Shah's approach, followed their usual tactics against the Durrani, retreating to the hills and jungles and to the Doab Jalandhar. The Kabul Chief entered

²⁹ Husain Shahi, p. 40.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Lahore (Rajab, 1 11). There he repaired the fort, "ordered Sher Md. Khan to gather the armours of the army and bid them make with speed 500 new wall-pieces as well as artillery for the field."³¹ Letters were also sent to the Subahdar of Multan, asking him to come with 10,000 horsemen and 2,000 camels and his treasury. The Daudputra chief and the Sindhian Amirs were also ordered to march on to Lahore.³² The three conjoint Sikh rulers fled away on the approach of the Shah. Immediately after entry, an order was issued in the name of the Shah that the people should illuminate. Later he was informed that some of the Hindu residents had not illuminated their houses and it seemed as if these were in mourning. They were, thereupon, fined. It was, as the chronicler says, "a self-inflicted oppression. If some such order of Nadir Shah had been disobeyed, all the people would have been put to death."³³ The

³¹ Arzee from the news, writers at Jeypoor, 22nd Rajab, 1211.

Foreign Department, Political Consultation, 20th February, Nos. 29A-31.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Husain Shahi, p. 41. Tarikh-i-Ahmadshah, p. 35.

people of Lahore presented to him a *nazarana* amounting to a lakh of rupees.³⁴

Though the Sikhs had, consistently with their tradition of fighting, fled away, their fort in Amritsar held out.³⁵ “Near 6,000 or 7,000 Seick Koshusspah horsemen (each man riding one horse belonging to himself) and 1,000 Akaul Boongecah foot (a sort of devotee soldiers and very warlike) remain all day armed and on the watch in a fort near Amritsar.”³⁶ Zeman Shah on his way to Lahore left garrisons at Gujrat as well as at Ramnagar in order to keep under control the zaminders in the regions between the Jhelum and the Chenab. But immediately after his departure, the Sikh Sardars of the region assembled together and drove off the people of these *Thanas*.³⁷ Zeman Shah would every day send flying columns against the Sikhs and at the same time, he encouraged the Sikh

³⁴ Foreign Dept., Political Consultation, 20 Feb., No. 29.

Enclosure from the Resident with the Sindhia, dated 27th January, 1797.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.* Arzee from Syud Reja Khan, written 23rd Rujub.

³⁷ Foreign Consultation, 20th February, 1797, No. 52.

chiefs to submit to him. Several Sikh chiefs actually attended his court at Lahore.³⁸ We, however, hear that the Shah sent the van of his army to Amritsar but "on the road coming to an engagement with the Sicks and two or three hundred being killed and wounded on either side and they considering they were few and the occasion was unfavourable, returned to Lahore."³⁹ In any case, the Shah had made a very prudent beginning. He did not allow his troops to use much violence against the people and the policy of conciliation, if adhered to, would have borne much fruit. It was, however, already apparent that the Shah would find it difficult if not impossible to beat the Sikhs at their game. The Suba of Lahore could only be settled by driving out the Sikhs but they could not be driven out. As Roy Singh wrote to the British government "the Sikhs were bent upon repelling this disturbance."

When the news of the coming of Zeman Shah spread everywhere, Jalal Bhatti, Nizamuddin Khan,

³⁸ Husain Shahi, p. 41.

Elphinstone, Account of Kabul, Vol. II, p. 315.

³⁹ Foreign Political Consultation, 20th February, No. 52, 24th Rajab.

the chief of Kasur and other Moslem zamindars waited upon him.⁴⁰ Zeman Shah was thinking of marching on towards Delhi. As the British Government was informed "Zeman Shah having pitched his tents four or five *Kos* further onwards on the side towards Dehly, absolutely intends marching thither."⁴¹ Zeman Shah had the intention of marching on to Shahjahanabad and drive the Marathas out. But this was not to be. As the chronicler bewails "it was not god's desire that the people of Hindusthan should spend their days in happiness and contentment."⁴² There were commotions in Kabul. Shah Mahmud was once again creating troubles. "He had assembled an army of twenty thousand men, mostly Persian of Khorassaun, with which he would probably have attacked Candahar, had he not been prevented by the King's speedy return."⁴³ Before he started from Lahore he had sent Muktar-ud-dowlah Hafiz Sher Md. Khan to Shaikhapura, 15 *Kos* to

⁴⁰ Husain Shahi, p. 41.

⁴¹ Foreign, Political Consultation, 20th February, No. 80.

⁴² Husain Shahi, pp. 41, 42.

⁴³ Elphinstone, Kabul, II, p. 316.

the west of Lahore. About 2-3,000 Sikhs were sheltered in that fort. With the topkhana and some troops Muktar-ud-dowlah had gone there. The place was besieged but the siege had to be raised not long after. The army of Zeman Shah retreated *via* Rohtas, Rawalpindi, Hasan Abdal, Attock and Peshawar.⁴⁴

But this Agamemnon was determined to take Troy. After gaining a victory over Shah Mahmud and putting him to flight, Zeman Shah immediately turned towards India. In the meantime the Sikhs had returned from their retreats and the whole of the Punjab had been lost once again. At the time of his retreat to Kabul in 1797, Zeman Shah had left behind him Ahmad Khan Shahanchi in the western Punjab. Hasan Khan Qazilbashi with 4,000 soldiers was placed under him in the Jalandhar Doab region.⁴⁵ But during his absence Ahmad Khan Shahanchi was killed. This incident, so damaging to the prestige of the Afghan monarch, is best described in the language of a contemporary despatch. Bibi Sahib Kour (Sister of Sahib Singh of Patiala) wrote to her

⁴⁴ Husain Shahi, p. 42a.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

brother from Ramnagar “ that the Sics had cut off and brought away Ahmad Khan Shahanchi’s head. That near 2,000 Dooranis had been slain and many wounded, that the Sics were pursuing the fugitives, plundering as they went. That now every fort would give way to them and they would recover all the country that had been wrested from them.”⁴⁶ Zeman Shah set off from Peshawar in October, 1798. He rapidly marched towards India. A grandson of Ali Muhammad Khan Rohilla, who had earlier gone to Kabul to quicken the zeal of the Kabul ruler, was Zeman Shah’s guide in this expedition. The Rohilla fugitive’s desire was that Zeman Shah would settle the affairs of the Punjab as rapidly as possible and reach Shahjahanabad. Zeman Shah re-occupied Lahore. The Sikh rulers of the city fled on his approach. Nizamuddin of Kasur “ offered to restore order in the Punjab in one year, if Abdali lent him men and money. The men he undertook to return, after raising his own levies : as to the money, he promised to submit to

⁴⁶ Foreign Political Consultation, 9th June, 1797, No. 70. Extract of Intelligence from Puttiala.

Kabul annually five lakhs of rupees as tribute.”⁴⁷ The offer was not accepted. But very soon Zeman Shah received the unwelcome news that his half-brother Shah Mahmud had induced the king of Persia to invade Afghanistan. He retreated precipitately from the Punjab, and though the Persian king no doubt withdrew, Mahmud ultimately got the upper hand. Zeman Shah was defeated and blinded. Thus his reign came to an inglorious close in 1799.

Zeman Shah should have tried first of all to secure the internal quiet of Afghanistan. He ought then to have turned his attention in the direction of Persia, which was threatening his power on the western frontier. The security of his western frontier was a necessity, if his eastern expeditions were to succeed. His ambition to be the arbiter of the fate of India, to restore the Mughal power, to crush the Sikhs and the Marathas, to revive the glory of the days of Ahmad Shah, seems, when all the factors are taken into consideration, to have been a mere dream. There was

⁴⁷ An Afghan Colony at Qasur, *Islamic Culture*, July, 1929.

now no longer any treasure in Delhi to reward his marches, nor could the Punjab be conquered by sporadic incursions. He could not even retain in India, a sufficiently strong force to overawe the Sikhs. If he had been able to remain longer in the Punjab, he might have taken advantage of the dissensions and discords that prevailed among the Sikh chiefs, no longer so united as in the days of Ahmad Shah Abdali. But before he had consolidated his sway in Afghanistan, it was sheer madness on his part to attempt to re-conquer the land of the Sikhs, an attempt that had failed even in the days of Ahmad Shah Abdali, who had a consolidated Afghanistan and the terror of his name to overawe his enemies. As it was, his "ill-directed and ill-timed attempts at Indian conquest" proved his undoing. The only permanent result of the invasions of Zeman Shah was that Ranjit Singh, the rising Sukerchakia chieftain, got a royal investiture of the capital of the Punjab, in exchange for his services in restoring some of the guns which the Afghan monarch had lost in course of his precipitate retreat in 1799.

To the Indian powers at a distance, the incompetence of Zeman Shah was not revealed. To them

he seemed to be a capable general and a powerful king and some such Muhammadan coalition as had crushed the Marathas at Panipat was sought to be organised against the supremacy of the English which was regarded as “the source of evil to all God’s creatures.”⁴⁸ It can only be said in the words of Elphinstone: “Had he been allowed to pursue his plan without interruption, its original defect would have been only the more conspicuous.” As Jassa Singh wrote to the British, the designs of Zeman Shah can only be characterised as “empty schemes of ambition.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Asiatic Annual Register, 1799, No. 30, From Tipoo to Zeman Shah.

⁴⁹ Foreign Political Consultation, 4th September, 1797. No. 38, p. 2.

CHAPTER VI

THE CIS-SUTLEJ SIKHS

The region between the Sutlej and the Jumna saw the establishment of four misls—Phulkia in all its branches, Karora Singhia, Shahid and Nihang, Nishanwala. The most important Phulkia states were Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Malod and Bhadour. The Kythal family also had the same origin. The Karora Singhia misl had its headquarters at Chiloundhi. One of its branches, the Kalsia house, was almost a minor confederacy. The possessions of this Kalsia family lay between the Jumna and the Makanda rivers, with Buria, on the south. The Shahid and Nihang misl was a confederacy composed of the followers of the Mahant of Damdama, Khari and Jaroli. The Nishanwala misl took possession of Ambala, Shahbad and other places. The Sikhs of Lidhram, were also members of this confederacy. Besides these confederacies we must also take into account the chiefships of Buria, Thanesar, etc. The

Moslem rulers of Maler Kotla and Raikot, also play an important part in Cis-Sutlej Sikh history. Many of the Trans-Sutlej chiefs had also strips of territory in modern Ludhiana and Ferozapore districts.

Without concerning ourselves with the jealousies and rivalries amongst these chieftains, we should devote our attention to those aspects of Cis-Sutlej Sikh history that have more than mere local interest. It is quite natural to expect that some power would arise in the Cis-Sutlej region, strong enough to weld together the entire region under one unified control, and this is just the welding which in the Trans-Sutlej region the Bhangis attempted and the Sukerchakias achieved. It appeared at one time that the house of Patiala would unify the entire Cis-Sutlej region under its sway. This was not possible on account of a weakling having unfortunately succeeded to the leadership of the house. In the history of the Sukerchakia misl, we find that Chharat Singh and Maha Singh were succeeded by the great Ranjit Singh. In the history of the Patiala house, we find Ala Singh and Amar Singh succeeded by the weakling, the imbecile Sahib Singh. Amar

Singh's death in 1781, in the very prime of his life was the greatest misfortune that could befall the Patiala house. Just as with the Bhangis, after the death in quick succession of Hari Singh, Jhanda Singh and Ganda Singh, the misl that had begun its career in a blaze of glory, began rapidly to decay, so was it the case with the Patiala house. It was a misfortune for Patiala that Amar Singh "died before he had consolidated his conquest, leaving to his child successor the dangerous legacy of his victories and fame."¹ Even when grown up, Sahib Singh proved to be a man of weak character, always in need of protection from some other power. No wonder that the decline of Patiala was henceforth very rapid.

There are two aspects of Cis-Sutlej Sikh history that may be of interest to the students of Indian History. The Sikhs were both on the offensive and on the defensive. They carried their almost annual depredations into the tracts of the country, ruled by Najib-ud-Daulah and his successors, and the *Antarvedi* or the *Ganga-Jamuna* Doab received much attention from them. But they were also

¹ Lepel Griffin, Punjab Rajas, p. 54.

sometimes pinned on the defensive. An aspiring Delhi minister, would at times turn his attention to this region. Mahadji Sindhia and his lieutenants naturally regarded it, in view of its chaotic state, as a fit region for plunder. Adventurers like George Thomas "arose to distract the attention of the Sikhs from the offensive to the defensive."

If we survey the history of the Cis-Sutlej Sikhs chronologically, we find them between 1764-70, worrying Najib-ud-Daulah who was the dictator of Delhi, during the absence of emperor Shah Alam II. The Sikhs succeeded in dealing effective blows to his power and embittered the last days of his life, just as the Marathas had done in the case of Alivardi Khan during the years 1742-51. Najib died in 1770, Emperor Shah Alam II returned to Delhi in 1772 and strove to regain his lost power with Maratha help. But in 1773, troubles in the Deccan led to the recall of the Maratha army from the north and the Cis-Sutlej Sikhs had to deal only with the decadent Mughal power as represented by its leading Amirs like Najaf Khan, Majd-ud-Daula Abdul Ahad Khan, Shafi Khan and Afrasiab Khan. This is the

second phase of Cis-Sutlej history. From 1781, Mahadji Sindhia “bestrides the plains of Northern India like a Colossus” until his death in 1794, and even after this Maratha ascendancy in Delhi continued until the Maratha power in North India was shattered in the victorious campaigns of Lord Lake. With 1784, we therefore enter upon the third phase of Cis-Sutlej Sikh history which continues up to 1803, when Lord Lake entered Delhi and British ascendancy was established.

The Sikhs in November, 1763, assembled at Amritsar, marched upon Sirhind, defeated and killed its Abdali governor Zain Khan. Flushed with victory, they crossed the Jumna, took Saharanpur (1764) and plundered the Barha Sadat settlements, “for a long time, the homes of respectable men and of old Sayyid families, members of which had been *umra* in former times. They took booty beyond count in coins, pure gold and jewels, burnt all the country and took away captives.” This was the territory of Najib-ud-Daulah who was naturally very much disconcerted by this news. He had only recently succeeded in killing his most formidable rival, the Jat Chief Suraj Mal, in a skirmish and

was perhaps chuckling over it. Now all of a sudden, a new enemy appeared. The Sikh menace to his power was quite formidable, inspite of the fact that the Sikh opposition he had to face was quite different from that which was proving the undoing of Ahmad Shah Abdali. Here the Sikhs were excited not by patriotism but by the lust for plunder. These predatory incursions were in no sense national ventures. There was no general union of the Sikhs with an exalted patriotic purpose as was the case with those who combined against Abdali. But the movement gained the sympathy of all.² The Budha Dal from the Jalandhar Doab and the Cis-Sutlej chiefs would send their predatory hordes, but if they were hardpressed by an enemy pursuing them beyond the Jumna, the Manjha Sikhs would come to their aid. Thus Najib was faced with the prospect of seeing his life's work undone by these enemies, whom even if he defeated, he could not certainly crush. From the Maratha records we learn that he bought off these new enemies by the

² They went of their own free will to Hindustan to loot. There was no pressure put on anybody.—Hakikat. p. 39.

payment of 11 lakhs of rupees.³ This is corroborated by Bakht Mal who writes that at the instance of Jowahir Singh, son and successor of Suraj Mal, “Khushal Singh, Sahib Singh, Baghail Singh, Bhag Singh crossed the Doab and began plundering there. They looted, killed and imprisoned people. Najib, on hearing this, postponed his Jat campaign and came to an understanding with the Sikhs.”⁴ This was a foolish policy as Najib himself must have known. Like Alivardi's payment of Chouth to the Marathas, this would only whet the appetite of the Sikhs. Najib was probably driven to this step by an impending attack of the entire Jat nation, maddened by the death of their great leader Suraj Mal.

Towards the close of the year 1764, Jowahir Singh with Maratha help besieged Najib in Delhi. In the meantime, “at the end of November or the beginning of December, a fierce horde swept over the Upper Doab from its extreme north away to the Barha Sadat settlements, along the Ganges. The visitation is regarded among the most terrible that ever befell the Muhammadan settlers.”

³ Peshwa Daftar, XXIX, p. 55.

⁴ Khalsa nama, p. 34B.

“The Raughurs and Gujars took advantage of this to plunder with alacrity. Most probably the leaders of the raid were Jassa Singh Kalal and Thoka Singh Barhee.”⁵

Early in January, 1765, Jowahir Singh successfully concluded an alliance with the Sikhs. It was settled that they would help him in the siege of Delhi, from trenches in the north of the city and scour the country from the west so as to cut off provisions entirely.⁶ But the Sikhs had no skill in siege operations. They were excellent foragers. They might skirmish better than any other troops but for the tedious operations of a siege or a blockade, they were by temperament and by tradition, unfit. “Every day the Sikh troopers used to ride out and enter the old houses which lay desolateand wished to come towards the city walls. Najib, leaving his men at different places in the trenches near the rivers, himself with a force of horse and foot.....mounted on elephants came out by the Lahori gate, posted his men, each under the cover of some ruined house or lane..... The Rohillas engaged the Sikhs with their matchlocks.

⁵ G. R. C. Williams, *The Sikhs in the Upper Doab*.

⁶ Nuruddin, p. 83A.

The musketry fight continued briskly till two gharis after nightfall.....In this manner, fighting with the Sikhs went on for nearly one month.” It is a well known fact that the lukewarmness of Imad-ul-Mulk and Malhar Rao Holkar, two other prominent allies of Jowahir Singh, practically thwarted him. Very soon news came that Ahmad Shah Abdali was coming to relieve his hardpressed lieutenant and the Sikh allies of Jowahir left abruptly, without asking for leave, when they heard that Abdali had entered Lahore. Of course, Jowahir Singh had no other course left but to conclude peace with Najib.

In 1765-66, Najib had to fight two Sikh bands of marauders. One band spread through the pargana of Saharanpur. At Samli, a severe fight took place. It very well illustrates the characteristics of the Sikh method of fighting as also the stubbornness and the skill of the veteran Afghan warrior :—

“ There were many sugarcane plantations nearby. The Sikhs took cover in them : band after band came out, emptied their matchlocks and then went off. They fought in this manner till one *pahar* of the night. They then retired. Najib

encamped there at night and in the morning again rode out and attacked the Sikhs. He tried to keep his troops in a compact band and not to let them get out of hand. This fighting went on from morning till noon. The Sikhs who were loaded with plunder, wanted to keep Najib's army engaged and take advantage of this to carry off their belongings. Najib knew this and his one objective was to push on and on, keeping his soldiers as a compact body. But Zabita Khan's division was very hard pressed and in the impetuosity of attack, it became separated from the rest and with great difficulty saved from being overwhelmed. The Jumna was almost reached and the Sikhs only wanted a respite from the frontal attack in order to send their belongings across the stream. They fell upon the rear where there was a great uproar. The Rohillas in their pride, felt it improper not to give the Sikhs a fight. The Sikhs thus succeeded in ruining Najib's plan of battle. They maintained the ground until darkness and then under the cover of the night succeeded in removing everything across the Jumna." ⁷

⁷ Nuruddin, pp. 1006b-1066a.

Another Sikh band was responsible for depredations "in pargana Dawana Kharkhand, 20 miles east of Rohtak, one day's march from Delhi." But the men were on the alert and the Sikhs made a raid on Rewari, which they plundered. The villages of Najib in the Mian Doab were also ravaged not long after.⁸ It is interesting to note that the Sikhs caused such insecurity even in the neighbourhood of Delhi that Najib's Delhi agent had to proclaim at one time that none should leave the city of Delhi to make a pilgrimage to Kalika Devi⁹ (near the Kutb Minar).

In 1766, we again hear of the old Afghan chief fighting the Sikhs with the vigour of a youth. The Sikhs were retreating after having acquired much booty in their fight with Malhar Rao, on

⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 107a-107b.

⁹ D. C., 17th April, 1766: "The Sikhs, marching from Okhla ghat, looted the rice and molasses in Sahibganj and encamped at Masuri. Some of the Sikh troops came to the foot of Shaikh Md. and carried off some camels and bullocks." 17th April.

"News came that the Sikhs had raided Kutanah Jhunjhana and Budhana and that Najib having come up had slain and wounded many of these horsemen and captured much of the booty." 22nd April.

behalf of Jowahir Singh. For once at least those swift horsemen were taken completely by surprise and a vast amount of booty fell into the hands of Najib, including camels, horses and ponies. Many Sikhs were slain and the rest driven across the Jumna.¹⁰

Ahmad Shah Abdali invaded India for the last time in 1767. He encamped on the Beas, and Najib was there in attendance. The irrepressible Sikh bands availed themselves of this opportunity and attacked Najib's territory in Meerut and the surrounding regions. Najib's son Zabita with 5,000 Rohilla troops and Sardar Jahan Khan with 8,000 Afghan troops, made a lightning raid, marching 120 *Kos* in three days. But the Sikhs had got a scent of it beforehand and most of them went away across the Jumna. Baghail Singh was wounded in this encounter.

While Najib was marrying his son Kalu Khan at Aonla and festivities were going on, the Sikhs spread in the parganas of Panipat and Karnal.¹¹ In spite of his failing health Najib had to exert

¹⁰ Nuruddin, pp. 109a, 109b.

¹¹ Nuruddin, p. 114a.

himself much in order to expel them. Of this Sikh expedition it has been said that the Sikhs permanently established their claim on Nanoutah.¹² Soon after this Najib practically abdicated and he died in 1770.

We can best sum up Najib's relations with the Sikhs in the language of the royal historiographer of Kabul: "The Budha Dal Sikhs used to go towards Delhi and so long as Najib Khan was living, he would fight with them almost every year and was always victorious but the country suffered. In every pargana Kacha Killahs had to be built and every village had a mud fort.¹³ But it has been estimated that the revenue of Najib's fief which was calculated at 100 Lakhs of Rupees, was reduced by these Sikh depredations to seventy, in three years.¹⁴ The damage done to his fief was permanent. It was only the absence of artillery that prevented the Sikhs from permanently subjugating the country but they would always invade at the time when the crops were cut and would levy their contribution, whether we term it

¹² Williams, *The Sikhs in the Upper Doab*.

¹³ *Hakikat*, p. 37.

¹⁴ Forster. I, p. 130.

Rakhee or *Kambalce*. Najib-ud-Daulah practically acknowledged himself beaten. It was this Sikh menace that was responsible for his eager desire just before his death to come to an understanding with the Marathas. He could perhaps feel before his death, that his successors would be crushed between the upper and nether millstones of Maratha and Sikh power.

Thus the Sikhs made this greatest Indian lieutenant of Abdali feel that he was beaten. Just as in the case of Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Sikhs refused to fight pitched battles with Najib, but even if they were surprised and defeated, they refused to be beaten. Najib, the adventurer was not a little responsible for the success of the Abdali inroads, the atrocities, the agonies, the oppression and extortion, the massacre and dishonour that must always remain associated with those dark days. Directly and indirectly responsible for so much woe and so much shame, his career would have given a great shock to our sense of divine justice if it had mellowed into an exquisite evening. But in his old age, when he was looking forward to a period of repose, the Sikh power arose and when almost incapacitated by illness, the

consciousness of ultimate failure embittered the last years of the dying man.

Now begins the second phase of Cis-Sutlej Sikh history. Shah Alam II, who was passing his days in exile in Allahabad, re-entered Delhi on the 6th January, 1772. This restoration to the capital of his ancestors, he owed to the Marathas. It is interesting to note that the Sikhs had made him a similar offer but Shah Alam had declined "to take that action unless the whole body of Sikh Sardars formed a binding confederacy to escort him and sent a written pledge."¹⁵ Very soon however, the emperor and his new allies fell out with each other. But with the death of the Peshwa Madho Rao, a period of confusion began in Maratha history. "The plains of Panipat were not more fatal to the Maratha empire than the early end of this excellent prince."¹⁶ His successor Narayan Rao recalled the Maratha army from the north. Then began a civil war in Maharashtra which was merged in the first Anglo-Maratha war. We have to wait until 1784, before

¹⁵ C. P. C., II, p. 849.

¹⁶ Grant Duff, History of the Marathas, Vol. II.

Maratha ascendancy is re-established in Delhi. In the intervening period between the retirement and death of Najib-ud-Daulah and the retreat of the Marathas southwards, we hear of the Sikhs as the possible allies of Mir Qasim in his projects of restoration.¹⁷ We also hear of them as trying to fish in the troubled waters of the Jat war of succession.¹⁸

From 1773 to 1783, we have a connected history of the ebb and flow of the Sikh tide of invasion from the Cis-Sutlej region eastward. It was only their hopeless disunion that prevented them from wresting power from the hands of the factious nobility and establishing their ascendancy in the court of the *roi faineant* Shah Alam. A consistent imperial policy presupposes a strong central government or the ascendancy of a single mighty intellect. The almost anarchic constitution of the Sikhs made it impossible either to evolve or to pursue such a well laid-out policy.

From 1773, the most live issue in the Delhi court was the rivalry between Najaf Khan and

¹⁷ Select Committee Proceedings, 16th Feb., 1770, p. 55.

¹⁸ C.P.C., III, March 16, 1770 ; March 18, 1770.

Abdul Ahad Khan. The Sikhs knew this and availed themselves of this rivalry. We hear of them in 1773, entering into a friendly alliance with Najib's successor Zabita Khan and overrunning the Upper Doab.¹⁹ From the Delhi chronicle we learn that they looted Shahdera till midnight and carried off fifty boys.²⁰

We hear of Shah Alam II inviting the Sikhs to enter his service with 10,000 horse and even promising to give Shahbazpur for support. He also sent Khilats for the Sikh chiefs.²¹ The Sikhs carried on their depredations with impunity. Najaf Khan raised an army of 50,000 troops, proposed to punish the Sikhs and bring the country as far as Lahore under royal control. Abdul Ahad wanted to steal a march over his rival. He secured the appointment of Prince Farkhunda Bakht as the foudar of Sirhind. Samru, the celebrated free-lance, was selected as his naib. He was sent towards Sirhind and some parganas in the possession of the Sikhs were given him for his support. But Samru was defeated by the Sikhs, he did not

¹⁹ G. R. C. Williams, *The Sikhs in the Upper Doab*.

²⁰ D. C., 18th January, 1774.

²¹ C. P. C., IV, May 18, 1774, No. 1026.

get his pay and resigned. Abdul Ahad, however, parleyed with the Sikhs and they even made their appearance in the neighbourhood of Delhi.²²

In 1775, Zabita, restored to his jagir through the good offices of Najaf Khan, found himself almost at the mercy of Sikhs. A large Sikh army headed by Rai Singh, Tara Singh and Baghail Singh crossed into the territory of Zabita, who retreated to Ghousegarh. They ransacked Gungo, Nanutah, Deobund, invested Zabita Khan in Ghousegarh, who had to buy them off by the payment of Rs. 50,000, money down. They marched up to Meerut and recrossing the river at Sonapat went southwards as far as Delhi. "Boorea was now irrevocably severed from Shahranpur and Zabita Khan's jurisdiction dwindled to the average size of a modern Collectorate. Abandoned by a court to which he had never owed much at any time and completely at the mercy of the Sikhs, he formed an alliance with his truculent neighbours and reasserted his independence of Emperor Shah Alam."²³ Towards the close of the year we hear of a proposal

²² *Ibid*, No. 1184, July 27, 1774.

No. 1362, Nov., 1, 1774.

²³ G. R. C. Williams, *The Sikhs in the Upper Doab*.

to buy Sikh support with 50,000 rupees which they wanted through Abdul Qasim Khan. But as no reliance could be placed on their promise, the proposal was dropped.²⁴

In 1776, a combined Sikh and Rohilla army numbering 30,000 to 40,000 men proposed to advance upon Delhi. Najaf Khan with his army was engaged in besieging Dig. Foujdar Kasim Ali Khan was sent against them but he was defeated and killed. Fortunately for the imperialists Dig was taken by Najaf Khan and he was free to turn his attention to the defence of Delhi. The Sikhs carried on their depredations up to Aligarh. Meerut, Secundra, Khurja were all plundered. There is a tradition that Zabita Khan, in order to ingratiate himself with the Sikhs, renounced his Muhammadanism, became a Sikh and changed his name to Dharm Singh. There is a saying current in Saharanpur district "*Ek Guru ka do Chele, Adha Sikh, Adha Rāheleh.*"²⁵ This is corroborated by the Siyar-ul-Mutakkharin : "he even concluded a treaty with them, by which he subscribed to such

²⁴ C. P. C., IV, No. 2033, November, 1775.

²⁵ G. R. C. Williams, The Sikhs in the Upper Doab.

articles and entered into such close connections with those people, that a report spread everywhere, as if he had forsaken Mussalmanism and made himself a member of their community.”²⁶ It is interesting to note that when Zabita Khan was advancing towards Delhi, after having completely defeated, with Sikh help, the royal army under Qasim Khan, ambassadors approached the Sikh chiefs on behalf of the Nawab Wazir Asaf-ud-Daulah. In the course of these negotiations, the Nawab Wazir freely made use of the name of his British allies. He wanted to expel Zabita Khan from the Doab and establish his own government there. Ray Singh and other Sikh chiefs at first declined the proposal, as they had earlier declined a similar proposal of Majd-ud-Daula. A second time the proposal was made and the name of the British as the guarantors of the compact was freely used. On behalf of the Nawab Wazir, the Sikhs were offered ten lakhs, one half to be paid on the conclusion of the alliance, one half on the defeat of Zabita Khan. The Nawab Wazir also offered to pay them half the annual

²⁶ Siyar, IV, pp. 109-10.

revenues of the Doab. Because of the advantages of friendship with the English “who were so true to their engagements,” the Sikh chiefs ultimately entertained the offer. Now, it was the Wazir's turn to withdraw from the compact, leaving the Sikhs in the lurch.²⁷

Najaf Khan began his campaign with great energy. A bloody battle was fought between Ameeranagar and Ghousegarh. “It was indecisive. Desperate fighting and incessant skirmishes marked this campaign. Walter Reinhardt joined the Imperialists. Ultimately, however, Zabita Khan and his allies were defeated after an engagement for a whole day.²⁸ “On 11th Shavan, 14th September, 1777, there was a severe battle in which the Rohillas and their confederates the Sikhs were totally defeated. Ghulam Qadir, Afzal Khan, Sultan Khan and other Rohilla chiefs surrendered. Zabita fled for life across the Jumna.”²⁹ He was ultimately granted pardon, betrothed one of his daughters to Najaf Quli Khan, Najaf Khan's adopted son, persuaded Najaf Khan himself to accept

²⁷ C. P. C. V., September 20, 1776.

²⁸ Siyar, IV, p. 111.

²⁹ C. P. C. V, October 27, No. 1777.

a sister of his and thus got back the foudari of Saharanpur Buria.³⁰ Now, of course he had to reckon with the enmity of the Sikhs who could not excuse what they regarded as amounting almost to desertion.

Early in 1779, the Sikhs who had been raiding the Doab, carried their predatory incursions up to Najibabad. "The English army that was stationed near the Daranagar ghat, crossed the river and went in pursuit of the miscreants but was obliged to return as it was comparatively small in number. In the meantime, Abdul Ahad Khan, the Delhi minister, rival of Najaf Khan, formed a plan of launching an attack on the Sikhs. He most probably hoped that the Sikhs had been considerably weakened by the defeat they had suffered from Najaf Khan and as a result he would be easily successful. Moreover it was high time that he should show some glorious achievements to his credit as, otherwise, his rival was fast outshining him. At first Abdul Ahad wanted Prince Jewan

³⁰ Siyar, IV, p. 111.

News came that on 20th Sept., Nawab Zulfikar-ud-Daula (Najaf Khan) handed over the mahals of Saharanpur, etc., to Nawab Zabita Khan.

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Bakht to go as Sipahsalar. Jewān Bakht feigned illness.³¹ Then Shahzada Farkhunda Bakht was selected. Many Sikh chiefs joined Abdul Ahad, the most prominent among them being Baghail Singh. Karora Singh and Deso Singh of Kythal, Gajpat Singh of Jind had to promise to pay two lakhs. The Mughal army thus strengthened, reached Patiala. It was defended by Amar Singh. He was expecting reinforcements from the Trans-Sutlej region. If these did not arrive he hoped by means of gold to seduce Abdul Ahad. He began negotiations for peace. The Mughal invaders were lulled into a sense of security. Very soon, reinforcements arrived from the other side under Jai Singh Kanheya, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, Fateh Singh, Jodh Singh and Hakikat Singh. Amar Singh now sallied forth. The invading army found itself attacked on all sides. The whole army would have been annihilated if the Mughal artillery had not checked the Sikhs. Some of the Sikhs who had previously joined Abdul Ahad, separated from him, some deserted to their co-religionists and some

³¹ Ibrat, II, p. 8.

began to plunder his belongings. In utter discredit, he had to make a disgraceful and disorderly retreat to Panipat.³² Abdul Ahad was now, of course, completely crestfallen.

It is no wonder that after this there was no restraining the Sikhs. But now Mirza Najaf Khan, who had acquired an ascendancy in the Imperial Council, thought it absolutely incumbent on him to check the Sikhs effectively. In November, 1780, Mirza Shafi Khan was sent against them with 12,000 soldiers and a suitable train of artillery.³³ According to another estimate he had about 20/25 thousand troops with him.³⁴ He crossed the Jumna and sought to find out the Sikh army. A desultory warfare continued for some time. In the meantime, a band of Phulkia

³² Khalsanama, p. 37.

Ibratnama, II, pp. 8-16.

Francklin, Shah Alam, pp. 85, 86.

C. P. C., 1779, Aug. and Oct.

“News came that Prince Jewan Bakht and Nawab Majd-ud-daula (Abdul Ahad) had, on 14th Oct., retreated from Patiala without fighting and that the Sikhs were pursuing them.”—D. C., Oct. 16, 1779.

³³ Francklin, Shah Alam, p. 92.

³⁴ Delhi Yethil, I, No. 20.

Sikhs had marched almost unopposed up to Meerut. There at last a general action took place under the walls of Meerut. The Mughal artillery was mainly responsible for effectively routing the Sikhs. It is said that more than 5,000 men were killed. Gajpat Singh of Jind was taken prisoner. He had to pay 3 lakhs to effect his release. But this advantage was not followed up and it did not lead to an invasion of the Punjab as might naturally be expected.³⁶ Najaf Khan died on the 6th April, 1782 A.D.

Najaf Khan was an able man. The disgrace of Abdul Ahad Khan had for some time left him almost supreme in the court of Delhi. After his death, dissensions began between two rival Mughal Amirs, Afrasiab Khan and Mirza Shafi Khan, culminating in the murder of the latter. Afrasiab Khan was not certainly the man who could cope with the irrepressible Sikhs. They sent "each a

³⁶ Khalsanama, pp. 38-39. D. C., 11th Dec., 1780.

Francklin, Shah Alam, p. 92.

Ibratnama, II, pp. 41, 42, 43.

G. R. C. Williams, The Sikhs in the Upper Doab.

"News came that Mirza Shafi Khan had imprisoned Gajpat and 30 other Sikhs."

few sowars across the river regularly, every three or four months and collected taxes from their respective circles just like the imperial land revenue. The whole tract north of Meerut may be considered as Sikh territory.”³⁶ The anarchy and confusion which prevailed as a result of Sikh inroads is best illustrated from an entry in the Delhi Chronicle: “Sikhs from Kol encamp at Barari—set fire to Malkaganj and Sabzi Mandi, and slay the men of Mughalpura. The men of the city fled into the fort in terror.”³⁷ We hear of a Sikh band led by Baghail Singh penetrating to the very brink of the Ganges. They did not cross it as Nawab Wazir Asaf-ud-daula’s troops were there on the opposite side. Sikh bands penetrated even to the Siwalik ranges, made the Doon tributary and exacted four thousand rupees a year from the Maharaja of Garhwal. Forster writes: “The Sicques have an unrestrained access into these parts through the southern hills, which are broken by small valleys: and fearing no opposition from Zabita Khan, they can penetrate into the lower

³⁶ Williams, *The Sikhs in the Upper Doab*.

³⁷ D. C., March 8, 1783.

districts.”³⁸ The Sikhs took advantage of the supineness of Afrasiab Khan and their depredatory incursion very soon extended up to Rohilkhand, Chandausi, Hasanpur and other places. The big traders and merchants who lived there, were plundered by them.³⁹ Of course, the Nawab Wazir had English troops to protect him from these incursions but he was sufficiently alarmed. The Governor-General Warren Hastings had also his apprehensions and it has even been suggested that he deputed Major Browne to Delhi with the object of organising a confederacy against the Sikhs.

But with the murder of Afrasiab Khan, and the ascendancy acquired by Mahadji Sindhia in the court of Delhi, Cis-Sutlej Sikh politics took a new turn. Slowly but steadily Mahadji Sindhia got the upper hand.

Mahadji Sindhia entrusted Ambaji with the task of the management of his affairs in the Capital.⁴⁰ His policy was to divert the energy of the

³⁸ Forster Travels, I, p. 108.

³⁹ Ibrat, II, p. 281, 1198 A.H.

⁴⁰ D. C. “Ambaji was given the foudari of 28 mahals of Sonpat, etc., and the Karori of Sairs.” Also see Select Pro., 9th April, 1785.

Sikhs and put a stop to their incursions by taking some of their chiefs into Maratha service. He, however, met with very little success. There was, for some time, a talk of the Sikhs and the Marathas uniting together to attack the country of the Nawab Wazir Asaf-ud-Daulah,⁴¹ a protege of the British. The Sikhs actually crossed the Ganges and penetrated as far as Chandousi in Rohilkhand. The leaders of this expedition were Rai Singh Bhangi, Sher Singh, his nephew, Jodh Singh Chuchrowlee and Sahib Singh of Ladwa. Zabita Khan was unable to check them and remained within the walls of his fort at Ghousegarh. He died shortly after.

Mahadji Sindhia actually concluded a treaty with the Sikhs in the name of the *roi faineant* Mughal emperor. From the British records we learn that “the chiefs of the Khalsa with a force of 5,000 horse, being united in connection with the Sarkar with the victorious army, shall receive allowance and a jagir of 10 lacs of rupees, $7\frac{1}{2}$ lacs in the neighbourhood of Karnal and $2\frac{1}{2}$ lacs from the country of the Sarkar.”⁴² The Marathas

⁴¹ Sec. Pro., June 7, 1785.

⁴² Secret Proceedings, June 7, 1785.

records corroborate the British. The plundering raids of the Sikhs, and their realisation of *Rakhi* were to stop in the region beyond Panipat: the four mahals that were ceded to them in lieu of the payment of $2\frac{1}{2}$ lakhs of rupees were.....Gohana, Kharkhoda, Kopram and Maham.⁴³ The treaty was, however, still-born and not long after its conclusion we find the Sikh chiefs once again ranged in opposition to the great Maratha. This attitude of the Sikhs caused Sindhia some concern. He was then engaged in vigorously prosecuting the siege of Aligarh but Sikh incursions and encroachments required Maratha vigilance in the capital.⁴⁴

Early in 1786, the Marathas got a very welcome opportunity of interfering in Sikh affairs. One of the Maratha officers, Dhara Rao, was stationed in the Panipat region. Nanun Mal, Dewan of Patiala, hard pressed by rebel chiefs, approached him for help. He promised to pay 5,000 rupees a day, 3 lacs in cash and all the expenses.⁴⁵ The presence of the Maratha chief, with his army enabled Nanun Mal to re-establish his position and

⁴³ Delhi Yethil, June 14, 1785, p. 135.

⁴⁴ Secret Proceedings, August 24, 1785.

⁴⁵ Delhi Yethil, p. 160.

he took the earliest opportunity of paying off the Maratha chief and persuading him to withdraw. But Sikh predatory inroads into the Upper Doab continued, their levy of blackmail extending up to Meerut.⁴⁶ Mahadji was at this stage apprehensive lest they would join Ghulam Qadir, son of Zabita Khan, "The only independent Mussalman chief that remains in this quarter, though his resources are small." But the Sikh practice of indiscriminate plunder and annoyance most probably prevented some such close understanding.

In 1787, Ambaji himself invaded the Sikh country, with a view to subduing it, if possible. He was joined by Baghail Singh with 1,000 troops. He also wanted to take other chiefs like Karm Singh and Gurdit Singh into his service. He promised six annas a day per sowar. They demanded a large Jagir as had been given to Baghail Singh.⁴⁷ These negotiations proved abortive. About Baghail Singh it should be noted that he was the unfailing ally of all the invaders of the Cis-Sutlej region and of all prospective

⁴⁶ Delhi Yethil, I, p. 168.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 237.

subjugators of his countrymen and played a very unenviable part in Cis-Sutlej Sikh history. Dulcha Singh was another Sikh chief who joined the Marathas. Ambaji also succeeded in persuading Ghulam Qadir to join him. He advanced very near to Patiala. This invasion of Ambaji was undertaken at a time, when Sindhia was very hard pressed and needed all his resources to enable him to overwhelm the Rajputs and discontented Muhammadan chiefs. The Sikhs weakened him to some extent by obliging him to detach some of his troops to prevent their incursions. The expedition however failed. Ghulam Qadir suddenly retired. "A douceur of 20,000 rupees from Nanun Mal was what chiefly induced him to quit so abruptly."⁴⁸ Ambaji still talked of advancing further into the Sikh country. But he knew that there was a Jaipur agent, well provided with money, who was attempting to seduce his Sikh allies. "He had no reason to rely on their honour or moderation. He was accompanied in his return journey by Baghail Singh and other Sikh Sardars who had joined him at Panipat,

⁴⁸ Secret Proceedings, 2nd July, 1787 No. 8.

except Rai Singh who had gone away with Ghulam Qadir. In such circumstances, the retreating army would almost invariably have been plundered. But in this case "The Sikhs contented themselves with carrying off two hundred heads of cattle and with sometimes robbing his camp in the night."⁴⁹

Now, Ghulam Qadir began that insensate career which "darkened the bright star of the august Timurian family, and buried in the whirlpool of destruction, the stately vessel of Imperial authority."⁵⁰ Sindhia's defeat at Jaipur encouraged him to collect troops and rush to Delhi. Ghulam Qadir drove the Maratha garrison from Delhi, joined Ismail Beg, the rebellious condottierie chief, and defeated an army of Mahadji under Rane Khan near Agra. But here an incursion of the Sikhs stood Sindhia in good stead. The Sikhs as usual led their predatory incursions into the territory of Ghulam Qadir and also began to plunder the region around Delhi. Ghulam Qadir hastily turned back to repel the Sikh

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 6th July, 1787, No. 1.

⁵⁰ Francklin, Shah Alam, p. 176.

invaders and thus enabled Rane Khan to rout Ismail Beg. Ghulam Qadir soon after came to the capital, blinded the emperor, deposed him, plundered the Imperial palace, dishonoured and degraded the royal family but on the approach of the reinforced Maratha army, he withdrew from Delhi. While Ghulam Qadir was still in Delhi an offer was made by Sindhia to Baghail Singh and Nanun Mal to join him with troops. Ghulam Qadir also tried to win them over. Naturally, always acting from mercenary motives these chiefs tried to strike a bargain suggesting that they would join whichever side would pay more.⁵¹ After one month's halting in different places Ghulam Qadir entered Meerut.⁵² In the meantime Ghulam Qadir's mother wrote to the Sikhs, begging for help on behalf of her son and offering, of course, the usual monetary inducement.⁵³ Ghulam Qadir was, however, compelled to evacuate Meerut, taken prisoner, suffered a dreadful mutilation and died in consequence. It is suggested that the idea

⁵¹ Delhi Yethil, p. 317.

⁵² D. C., 6th November, 1788.

⁵³ Delhi Yethil, p. 35.

of withdrawing to the Sikh country might have been in his mind when he evacuated Meerut.

Now that Sindhia's position was secure, and he had annexed the possessions of Ghulam Qadir, it was incumbent upon him to stop the almost periodic incursions of the Sikhs into the Ganges-Jumna Doab as also their frequent plundering raids carried up to the very walls of Delhi. The Maratha leaders Rane Khan and Ali Bahadur crossed into the Sikh country. They advanced very near to Patiala. Dewan Nanun, shabbily treated by the Patiala Darbar, went over to the Marathas. Rani Rajinder, a daughter of Bhumiya Singh, a son of Ala Singh, was the most prominent person in the court of Patiala. She offered to accompany the army and go to the Patel to settle terms. She actually went to Mathura where the Patel received her with great honour, a nazarana of one lac was promised and paid.⁵⁴ Not long after this both Nanun Mal and Rani Rajinder died.

Though the Sikhs were checked, their predatory activity did not cease. We find in the Maratha

⁵⁴ Khalsanama, p. 64a.

Delhi Yethil, I, 379, 381, II, p. 14.

records that Deoji Gouré, Bapuji Malhar, Gopal Rao Raghunath, Madho Rao Phadke and others were employed by the Maratha chief to stop the plundering raids of the Sikhs.⁵⁵ We can form some idea of the activities of the Sikhs between 1790-94 from some of the entries in the Delhi Yethil against different dates.

4th September, 1790.—Last year, the Sikhs carried away Mr. Stuart from Anupshahr and he remained imprisoned till released on payment of 60,000 rupees by Begam Samru.

October, 1791.—Deoji Gouré and Bapuji Malhar all at once fell upon the Sikhs. 40/50 of them were killed or wounded and 100 horses were taken. Other Sikhs fled away towards Patiala.

26th February, 1790.—The Sikhs created a great commotion on the borders of Antarvedi. As Rarhoji Sindhia and Bairo Pant approached, they crossed the Jumna and went towards Panipat.

3rd November, 1790.—7/8 thousands Sikhs, headed by Bhanga Singh, Karm Singh and others,

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, II, pp. 35, 47, 68.

crossed the Jumna. Ghousegarh, Meerut and the Antarvedi were looted by them.⁵⁶

In 1794, Nana Rao was sent across the Jumna to subdue the Sikh country and to secure nazarana. The chiefs of Jind and Kythal sent presents. But Sahib Kour, sister of the Raja of Patiala, who directed the affairs of the state there, would not willingly agree to such a tame submission. She succeeded in securing the aid of Bhanga Singh and Mehtab Singh of Thanesar and other Phulkia chiefs. Tara Singh Gheba also sent a detachment. She herself had about 5,000 sowars with her. A battle was fought at Mardanpur. It continued up to sunset. It was the personal exertion and bravery of Rani Sahib Kour that prevented a retreat of the Sikh army. In the Maratha camp utmost confusion prevailed. Alarming rumours reached them that the Sikhs were coming in swarms across the Sutlej. Nana Rao with his army of 12,000 retired towards Karnal. The Sikhs attacked them on the banks of the Ghaggar. The Deccanee army might have been overwhelmed but for the arrival of Madho Rao with reinforcements. They could

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 28, 39, 68. Supplement 9.

now compel the Sikhs to withdraw. Fighting continued even on the second day until both parties were exhausted. The Sikhs, however, continued their hovering and harassing tactics. The Maratha army retreated to Panipat.⁵⁷

“The insecurity of his frontier, the Sikh predatory incursions, their claims to levy blackmail in the Doab all these led Mahadji Sindhia to contemplate an expedition for the chastisement of the more refractory chiefs, when death frustrated his designs in 1794.”^{57a} Under Mahadji Sindhia's successor Daulat Rao, Count De Boigne and after him Perron, managed Maratha affairs in the Delhi region. Their regularly trained well disciplined army greatly checked the Sikhs and their inroads. The actual state of things in the Doab can best be explained in the words of Williams. Earlier, after the establishment of Sindhia's authority in the Doab, “an arrangement was arrived at according to which the Sardar undertook the fiscal arrangement of certain parganas in the Doab, allotted to the maintenance of

⁵⁷ Khalsanama, pp. 53-54.

^{57a} Grant Duff, History of the Marathas, Vol. II.

Sikh contingents. Feudal tenures were bestowed upon them in commutation of their claims to blackmail. By this course of policy, the government gave a varnish of legality to a system of exaction that could not be wholly suppressed In 1801, Perron resumed all these jagirs. The only fiefs belonging to them in the Doab, entered in the schedule attached to the Treaty of Surji Anjengaon are Jhinjahana yielding a revenue of 36,554 and lands not specified with an income of Rs. 57,968, appropriated to the use of Gurdit Singh and Bhag Singh. Although Perron had resumed most of the Sikh Jagirs and in a great measure checked the excesses of the Sardars, he had utterly failed to abolish the custom of paying minor instalments of blackmail. In familiar language, he winked at the practice."⁵⁸ This was the actual state of Maratha-Sikh relationship in the Doab before the advent of the British power.

But in the region between the Sutlej and the Jumna, the Sikhs were, towards the close of the 18th century, suddenly placed on the defensive, not by the Marathas but by a new power. George

⁵⁸ G. R. C. Williams, *The Sikhs in the Upper Doab*.

Thomas, "the Jehaz-Firinghee" was one of the many free lances, whose career gives a charm to the history of the 18th century. When in Maratha service he had made a reputation for himself in fighting against the Sikhs. About 1797, he established himself in the Hansi-Hissar region as an independent chieftain. Now began his tussle with the Sikhs. He first made friendly overtures to the Sikh chiefs, Sahib Singh, Bhag Singh and others. They regarded the unscrupulous adventurer with suspicion and were not willing to further his schemes of ambition.⁵⁹ His aggressive career, however, synchronised with the reappearance of the Durrani menace and this placed him in a position of advantage. While the Sikh chiefs were preoccupied with devising means for thwarting Zeman Shah, George Thomas attacked Jind which was so near to Hansi. An attempt to storm the place having failed, he began a blockade. Bibi Sahib Kour of Patiala, with a big allied army, approached Jind. Thomas had to raise the blockade and at Narawind, 20 kos north of Hansi, a fight took place. He completely defeated the

Sikhs, got much booty but could not get possession of their artillery. After this a treaty was concluded according to which each was to remain in possession of the districts, as they stood before the siege of Jind.⁶⁰

It was not possible for George Thomas to remain quiet for a long time. He must pay his troops and this he could do only by plundering his weaker neighbours like Jind and Kythal. Moreover, "a rancorous enmity subsisted between his own troops, who were Mussalmans and the Sikhs" and they were very eager to fight the Sikhs. George Thomas may, to some extent, be said to have headed the Muslim reaction against Sikh triumph in the Cis-Sutlej region. He did not miss any opportunity of interfering in the affairs of the Cis-Sutlej region. When Ray Ilias, the boy chief of Raikot, was hard pressed by Bedi Sahib Singh, who proclaimed a religious war with a view to dispossess him, George Thomas's aid was applied for and in return for very valuable consideration Thomas came to his aid and restored to him his possessions. His last expedition he describes in

⁶⁰ Military Memoirs of George Thomas, pp. 137-139.

the following words : “ Thus ended a campaign of seven months, in which I was more successful than I could have possibly expected, when I took the field with a force, consisting of 5,000 men and 36 pieces of cannon, I lost in killed and wounded and disabled, nearly one-third of my force ; but the enemy lost 5,000 persons of all descriptions. I realized 2,00,000 rupees exclusive of the pay of my army and was to receive an additional 1,00,000 for the hostages which were delivered up. * * * I was dictator in all countries belonging to the Sikhs, south of the Sutlej.”⁶¹ A great part of this claim that he was the dictator of the Cis-Sutlej country, is empty rhodomontade. Thomas had only taken a page out of the book of Sikh history. What they did in the Karnal, Panipat, Delhi region and in the Doab, Thomas was now doing more effectively in their own country. Not that he was uniformly victorious. He was actually defeated in an engagement with the Jind chief near Sufidon. But as Lepel Griffin notes : “ The Sikhs had most to lose. Their towns and villages were sacked and their harvest destroyed, while the rapidity of the enemy's movements made it almost

⁶¹ Francklin, George Thomas, p. 215.

impossible to overtake him and the discipline he maintained made an attack upon him, even with far superior numbers, a "proceeding of doubtful wisdom." ⁶²

After the retirement of George Thomas to Hansi in 1801, the Cis-Sutlej chiefs, who had by this time enough of the Irish adventurer, sent a deputation to wait upon General Perron. Rani Sahib Kour was already dead. If she had been living, nobler counsels might have prevailed in Patiala. Perron sent a detachment under Louis Bourquin to operate in concert with the Sikhs against Thomas. The Patiala troops did not join. Thomas was defeated; he abandoned all his conquests and retired into British territory. The arrangement made between the Cis-Sutlej states and General Perron is worth careful scrutiny as the British Government later took its stand on this, in its disputes with the Sikh monarchy under Ranjit Singh. According to this arrangement tributes were to be paid by the Cis-Sutlej states to the Marathas as the price of assistance against

⁶² Lepel Griffin, *Punjab Rajas*, p. 87.

George Thomas, according to the following schedule :—

	Revenue.	Tribute.
	Rs.	Rs.
Patiala	1,14,750	38,250
Nabha	28,500	9,500
Jind	22,750	7,250
Maler Kotla	15,000	5,000
Raikot	60,000	20,000
Raipur and Gujranwala	15,000	5,000
Kythal	45,000	15,000
	<hr/> 3,00,000	<hr/> 1,00,000 ⁶³

It is very doubtful whether this tribute was ever actually realized and whether we are justified in attaching more importance to this Treaty than to the Treaty of Mahadji Sindhia with the Sikhs in 1785. All that we are justified in saying is that Maratha influence in the Cis-Sutlej Sikh country was an established fact. The understand-

⁶³ Lepel Griffin, Punjab Rajas, p. 421. Report of Negotiations in the Khalsanama. "The Malwa sardars agreed to pay 4 lacs, in cash (ashal, ashal) and one-third of the revenue(?) as the price for driving out George Thomas."

ing between Perron and the Sikh chiefs reminds us of the Treaty that was concluded in 1772 by Hafiz Rahamat with Shuja-ud-daulah against the Marathas. That impolitic treaty of Hafiz Rahamat was responsible for the Rohilla war and the annexation of Rohilkhand by Shuja. This understanding between Perron and the Sikh chiefs provided the British with some legal claims which were abundantly made use of in their dispute with Ranjit Singh, ultimately facilitating the annexation of the Cis-Sutlej Sikh country.

Here it may not be out of place to mention that there is also a substratum of truth in the statement that the Durrani monarchy had a *de jure* claim over the Cis-Sutlej country, especially in view of the fact that it was admitted by some of the states concerned. The Patiala coins were in the name of Ahmad Shah "By order of God the peerless to Ahmad Shah Badshah : strike coin on silver and gold from earth to heaven." The Jind coinage also acknowledged the *de jure* sovereignty of the Durrani. Only the Nabha coinage was purely Sikh with the famous couplet

"Degh O Degh O Fatah nasrat be dirang
Yaft az Nanak Guru Gobind Singh."

Coins were the most important visible symbols of *de jure* sovereignty in those days, and there is none other that can compare with these in importance. We must further take into consideration the fact that Ahmad Shah granted to Ala Singh of Patiala, the title of Raja and to his grandson Amar Singh that of Raja-i-Rajgan Bahadur and they continued to retain these Durrani titles. The Bhador chief was honoured with a parwana from Timur Shah in 1192 A. H., 1779 A.D. All these things point to a legal claim, almost acknowledged by all the powers concerned, with the only exception of Nabha.

The state of Indian politics at this period was such that it is impossible to say what constituted a sound title. This, practically, “depended solely on power and convenience and he was the ruler who possessed means of active interference.” As in the Schleswig-Holstein question, theoretical claims were of little use except in taxing the ingenuity of the jurists. The best claim under such circumstances was that of the sword.

CHAPTER VII

SIKH CONFEDERATE FEUDALISM AND BRITISH IMPERIALISM LATE IN THE 18TH CENTURY

We know much of Anglo-Sikh relations in the nineteenth century—the steady friendship between the British Government and the Sikh monarchy, the ultimate clash of arms and the collapse of Sikh militarism on the fields of Sobraon and Gujrat. But the relations between these two growing powers in the 18th century must have contained some germs out of which sprouted into full bloom in the 19th their mutual relations. The Sikhs established their hold in the Punjab, dammed the tide of Durrani invasion and parcelled the province out among themselves. During the period of their struggle for independence they presented more or less a united front against the Afghans. But the centrifugal tendency soon asserted itself and in the eighties of the century we find the individual chiefs who were heads of the misls, following a

policy of self-aggrandisement. Their weak confederation naturally left them in a position in which they were able to negotiate with the neighbouring powers in their own interest. There is another factor which must not be overlooked. The Trans-Sutlej Sikh misls had not much to do with the powers of Hindustan. Anglo-Sikh relations between 1780-1800, concerned mainly the Cis-Sutlej states. In this connection we can quote an extract from the British records that gives us an estimate of the Trans-Sutlej and Cis-Sutlej Sikhs : “ The Sikhs in Lahore and Multan form altogether a very respectable power.....They are prevented by necessity of watching the motives of each other from attempting to extend their conquests.....The Sikh chiefs immediately to the northward of Delhi are totally unconnected with these and are in fact nothing more than a number of petty plunderers.”¹

Warren Hastings in his Minute, dated the 4th December, 1784, recorded his opinion on the rising Sikh power. He regarded the Sikh power

¹ Extract from Secret Consultation, 24th Nov., 1786, No. 6.

extending “From the most western branch of Attock to the walls of Delhi,”² as a new object worth serious contemplation. The Sikhs, so eminently suited to the military profession could not become very powerful because of their spirit of independence and frequent internal warfare but they were prompt to rally together at the call of common danger. Warren Hastings visualised a change in their polity, the rise of an individual of rare capacity and enterprise, who would succeed in enveloping everything within his own supremacy. He feared that a new dominion would then ascend from the ashes of the Mughal empire and naturally wanted to prevent such a calamity to British Imperialism by “seasonable means of opposition”—“not to permit the people to grow into maturity without interruption.”³ Not until 1809, do we find British policy to take the turn that was contemplated by Warren Hastings but in the meantime Sikh polity had undergone the change he had prophesied. It is a remarkable example of Warren Hastings’s grasp of the reality of the

² Forrest, Selection, Vol. III, p. 1123. Governor-General’s Minute, 4th December, 1784.

³ *Ibid.*

Indian political situation with the instinct of a great statesman.

We have an excellent opportunity of realising the importance of the position of the Sikhs from the point of view of the growing British power. To use the language of Warren Hastings himself, we must not conclude that what has not happened in the ordinary course of events could never have happened. When we think of the Sikhs of the 18th century, we normally carry with us an idea of turbulent feebleness. But we must not overlook that Bussy, "the most brilliant representative of the political resident," saw in them a potential enemy of the British and a friend of the French. He recorded this as his opinion, and his opinion should carry as much weight as that of Warren Hastings himself. In 1784, he submitted to the French colonial minister a report of the political condition of India outside the sphere of British influence, so that plans for the formation of an anti-English confederacy could be formed. He added some words of caution—"I believe I ought to observe on the subject of the enmity, and friendship of the princes of this country, which some have caused to make such a noise in Europe,—

whether towards us or towards the English, that they exist solely for the reason of the personal interest of the princes and that as soon as their projects of fortune or ambition are satisfied, they become equally indifferent to the French or the English'The Sikhs pass for very brave men and it is the general opinion among the Mughals that none but the Sikhs and the Marathas can turn the English out of Bengal, the former by attacking the country on the left bank of the Ganges and the Marathas that on the right bank. It is not believed that the Sikhs have any alliance with the English.'⁴

Mahadji Sindhia, "the nominal slave but the rigid master of Shah Alam II, Emperor of Delhi," was from 1784-'94 the practical ruler of the region from the Sutlej to Agra. He suffered a temporary eclipse in 1786-'88, but very soon regained his authority. From the very nature of the circumstances, he played a very important part in Anglo-Sikh relations of the period. The Sikhs were making incursions into the Ganges-Jumna

⁴ Modern Review, 1925, Disunited India as seen by a Foreign Eye, A. Singaravelu.

Doab. Attempts were made to take them into his service but to no purpose. In May, 1785, Colonel Cumming was informed by two Sikh chieftains, Gurdit Singh and Maun Singh that Mahadji was negotiating with them to unite together against the English and the Nawab Wazir. The Sikh chiefs, however, informed Colonel Cumming that "this stranger having become strong in our own country will injure the whole world; if you, gentlemen, should be desirous of friendship, the chiefs of the Khalsa will not be separated from you."⁵ "Bung Singh Bahadree, Gudat Singh, Buksh Singh and Jodh Singh"⁶ also wrote to Colonel Cumming that there was negotiation afoot between Sindhia and the Sikh chiefs with a view to bring about commotions on the other side of the Ganges. They suspected that Sindhia's desire of friendship with them was due to his eagerness to get their help in the reduction of Aligarh but Sindhia is said to have assured them that the removal of the English was uppermost in his mind because "they were both his and our enemies and

⁵ Secret Proceedings, 7th June, 1785, pp. 1684-86.
Enclosure in Sir John Cumming's Letter No. 1.

⁶ *Ibid*, Enclosure No. 2.

would one day make war.....the remedying of that beforehand is advisable.”⁷ Those Sikh chiefs informed the British Government that they were “inclined to friendship with the British and to have no connection with the Marathas.” It is apparent that the Sikh chiefs wanted to make use of the widespread rumour that Sindhia was negotiating with them. They most probably hoped that the British would make counter-offers to ensure their support or neutrality. But the British reply was very vague and offered nothing alluring to the chiefs. They were informed that “the custom of the English is to maintain friendship with every person and especially with the powers of this country with whom friendship is particularly desired. It is proper that this system should be supported between us but this shall be the proof of your friendship that you should make no disturbance in the country of the Nawab Wazir.”^{7a}

A treaty was actually concluded between Sindhia, on behalf of the *roi faineant* Delhi

⁷ *Ibid.*

^{7a} *Ibid*, Enclosure No. 3.

Emperor and the Sikh chiefs (16th May, 1785). In the treaty itself we do not find any clause that is anti-British. It provided that the chiefs of the Khalsa with a force of 5,000 horse being united in connection with the Sarkar with the victorious army shall receive allowances and a jagir of ten lacs of rupees I am in friendship with the chiefs in the English company and with the Nawab Wazir. Let there never be any injury to their country.”⁸ Browne, however, writes that one of the articles of the Treaty expressly says as follows: “Besides the royal lands whatever shall be acquired by either party (Sindhia or the Sikhs) with mutual consent, on either side of the Jumna, from Hindus or Mussalmans, one-third thereof shall belong to the Khalsagee.....This clearly points to the Vizier’s country.”⁹ The Wazir’s country, as it is well known, was a British protectorate. It should however be noted that in the clauses of the definitive treaty as we find it in the British records there is no mention of such an

⁸ Secret Proceedings, 7th June, 1785, pp. 1689-90, Written 16th May, 1785.

⁹ Browne, India Tracts, p. 29.

offensive and defensive compact. The treaty between Sindhia and the Sikhs had no effect on the practical politics of the day nor was it ever observed by the contracting parties.

In 1787, William Palmer, Resident with Mahadji Sindhia was asked whether the British Government and the Nawab Wazir would approve of Mahadji Sindhia's attempt to reduce the Sikhs. The actual proposal was this.....“If Sindhia should commence hostilities against the Sikhs with the view of preventing their incursions and overthrowing their power entirely and settling their country under his authority what would the English Governor-General or the Nawab Wazir say in regard to the propriety of his operation.....would they think them necessary, proper or in short approve of them.”¹⁰ Sindhia's ascendancy had at that time suffered an eclipse. His defeat in Rajputana and Ghulam Qadir's advance upon Delhi seemed almost to shatter his authority in Hindustan. Naturally, such an ill-timed proposal for reducing the Sikhs, was regarded by Palmer with some suspicion. He disapproved and wrote

¹⁰ Secret Proceedings, 28th Nov., 1787, No. 4.

that there was a design “in case your lordship’s approbation of it should be obtained to excite the Sikhs to ravage the Vizier’s dominions, in the hope that such an outrage would draw our army to the scenes in which Sindhia is at present engaged; or at least in the appearance of supporting him which alone might be productive of material advantage to his cause.” ¹¹

Soon after the coming of Lord Cornwallis to India as Governor-General and Commander-in-chief, there was a proposal of raising a body of either Maratha or Sikh cavalry to fight in the Carnatic in the event of a war, and there was some loose talk about the superiority of the Maratha or Sikh cavalry over the Mughal. Also in a paper, handed over to Colonel Ross, it was suggested that though Sikh cavalry could move more rapidly than the Mughal, “it was doubtful whether a sufficient number could be levied and if levied, their obedience and fidelity could be relied on. These irregular troops and specially the Sikhs are very little under the control of their commanders and their commanders are as little restrained by the principles of honour or

¹¹ *Ibid*, No. 3.

good faith * * * gain being the object which the individual horseman pursues with inflexible steadiness, he will acquire it by plundering his own country and the property of his friends, if no other spoils offer. To the remonstrance that will be made on this head, the Sikh Sardar will remark with unaffected gravity that it is not in his power to alter the nature of his followers.”¹² This loose talk is interesting as it shows that the belief was widespread that the Sikh was incapable of discipline. Not until the successful military reforms of Ranjit Singh was this myth dispelled, and the Anglo-Sikh campaigns of the nineteenth century definitely established the fact that the Sikh was pre-eminently a disciplined soldier.

Towards the end of the 18th century, Zeman Shah, the king of Kabul, talked of following in the footsteps of his grandfather and getting rid of his internal difficulties by a call to arms. The Sikhs, who were guarding the North-Western frontier, all at once leap into prominence in the

¹² Copy of a paper written in pursuance of a desire expressed by Lord Cornwallis and delivered to Colonel Ross, October 27, 1787.

records of the predominant power of Northern India. This new champion of Islam created a stir throughout India ; even the brother of the Nawab of Dacca wrote a letter to him.¹³ There was a brisk correspondence between the Cis-Sutlej Sikh chiefs and the British resident in Oudh or in the camp of Doulat Rao Sindhia, the successor of Mahadji. Ray Singh, a Sikh chief of the Cis-Sutlej region, thus informed the British authorities : “ The disturbance that reigns in this quarter, meaning Zeman Shah’s invasion, cannot be in any respect unknown to you. The chiefs of the Khalsa repaired to places of security on account of their families and every one of them is bent upon repelling this disturbance and being now at ease with regard to their families, will take measures for that purpose. Your well-wisher with his brethren and chiefs is in force in Boorea. They have no knowledge of *Gourmitter*, which is called *Sillah Gobind*. The supreme being did before repel the devoted body

¹³ Lord Valentia’s Travels, London, 1811, Vol. I, Appendix 1—quoted by Whitehead in his Catalogue of Coins in the Lahore Museum, Vol. III.

(meaning the Abdallis) from this country and overwhelmed them and he will now do the same." ¹¹

Jassa Singh, another Sikh chief, most probably of the Ahluwalia misl, wrote to the British Resident at Lucknow in the same strain and both pleaded in favour of a system of mutual co-operation. Against the common enemy beyond the Attock gorge Wellesley proposed a league with the Rajputs, the Marathas and the Sikhs. An alliance with the Sikhs was, however, regarded by Major General Craig as impracticable from the point of view of sound strategy. If Zeman Shah had succeeded in advancing further into India, Anglo-Sikh relations might have taken a new turn. The precipitate retreat of the Kabul ruler prevented the growth of a cordial understanding between the Sikh confederation and the British Government.

George Thomas, an Irishman, a loyal British subject, a soldier of fortune, established himself as the Raja of Haryana about 1797. In 1802, he was worsted and driven out by an army sent by Perron

¹¹ Foreign Political Consultation, 1779, No. 63. Gourmitter, *i.e.*, Gurumat or resolutions of the assembly according to Sillah Govind or the rules of the 10th Guru.

to help the Cis-Sutlej states. The career of this bold adventurer is very significant. He had offered to advance and take possession of the Punjab in the name of his sovereign. Indulging in the extravagant language so characteristic of him, he is said to have remarked that he "aspired to the honour of planting the British standard on the banks of the Attock,"¹⁵ and that he was "the dictator of all countries belonging to the Sikhs south of the Sutledge."¹⁶ But with the Marathas still threatening danger, the project of Thomas seems to have been a very wild one, possible only with an adventurer, who cared for nothing but conquering raids and for whom the consolidation of the conquered lands has no significance. Not until 1809, did the British bring the land between the Sutlej and the Jumna under their control and the expectation of George Thomas was in part realized. If Ranjit Singh could have begun his Cis-Sutlej career several years earlier, he might have taken full advantage of the Anglo-Maratha

¹⁵ Franklin, *Military Memoirs of George Thomas*, p. 247.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 215.

war and the subsequent non-intervention phase of British foreign policy and might have forestalled the British in that region. We must not also overlook the fact that just as the Ten Thousand in their advance and retreat in the Persian Empire, served as the vanguard of the army led by Alexander and reconnoitred the ground for him, so did George Thomas for the British in the region between the Sutlej and the Jumna.

CHAPTER VIII

POLITY, ECONOMY AND MILITARY ORGANISATION OF THE SIKHS UNDER THE MISLS

An analysis of the polity and economy of the Sikhs during the misl period, must be prefaced by a short account of the transformation of Sikhism that is associated with the name of Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikh brotherhood was an established fact. It was the work of the successors of Guru Nanak. Nanak had preached the brotherhood of men, but this principle of fraternity, as applied to all mankind, is one of the weakest in practice, as the French Revolution and many other movements, political and religious, teach us. By precept and by example the successors of Guru Nanak sought to inculcate the supreme duty of service to the Sikhs in general and the sacrifice of the individual in the general body of the commonwealth. The visible external symbols of Sikh brotherhood, as also the habitual deference of the

Gurus to the will of their disciples, made the brotherhood a power until a Sikh could write thus—
“Where there is one Sikh there is one Sikh ; where there are two Sikhs there is a company of saints ; where there are five Sikhs, there is God.”¹

There were now two incompatibles in Sikh life—the supreme Guru and the almost equally supreme brotherhood. The two were of course in harmony, but sovereignty must ultimately be monistic, and the incompatibility, if persisted in, would certainly have led to a suicidal conflict. Guru Gobind Singh, that great awakener of consciousness, first reformed the prevalent abuses within the Sikh church and gave it unity and cohesion. He gave the Sikhs a new name, new dress, new equipments and new ceremonies. He also required all the Sikhs to carry arms, and impressed them with the idea that they were born to conquer. He told his followers to regard the sword as the principal stay in the world. A new form of initiation was introduced in which water was churned with a dagger. “Humility and

¹ Macauliffe, *Sikh Religion*, Vol. IV, Bhai Gur Das's analysis of the Sikh religion.

Prayer " was replaced by self-assertion and extirpation of the Turks. Guru Gobind Singh exalted military life above everything else. He is reported to have said, "He is of the Khalsa who combats in the van, who mounts the war horse, who is ever waging battle and who is continually armed." Finally, it was declared that "the Khalsa is the guru and the guru is the Khalsa." Now, practically all that the Sikhs had been taught to revere, could be satisfied by serving the Khalsa. Already devotion to God had become merged in the devotion to the Guru, and now love of God, obedience and service to the Guru and love for one another—all would consist in the service of the Khalsa or the commonwealth.

In this transformed system, we find an element of theocracy, along with a strong sense of brotherhood. The Sikhs were now a religious-minded warlike fraternity, intensely conscious of itself.

The central Government of the Sikhs during the misl period consisted of a tumultuous diet, the "Sarbat Khalsa," which met twice a year at Amritsar during the Baisakhee and the Dewali. They chose, by a majority of votes, a leader, but barely allowed him during his temporary elevation,

the dignity of *Primus inter pares*.² The confederacy was called *Khalsaji* and the grand army was called *Dal Khalsaji*. In civil life there was complete social equality amongst the Sikhs. In the meetings of the Sarbat Khalsa, every one could freely express his opinion. The decisions were by a majority of votes. The resolutions passed in the presence of the holy granth were *Gurumatta*. The grand diet made decisions about the important expeditions to be undertaken and matters of general concern. The amount of contributions levied was reported to the assembly and divided among the chiefs in proportion to the number of their troops. The assembly was summoned by the *Akalis*. When the Sikhs met, in such a gathering every man forgot his personal quarrels. The first assembly was summoned by the Tenth Guru himself, the last in 1805. This grand diet of the confederation, from the Sikh point of view, deliberated and resolved under the inspiration of an invisible being.

The Sikh constitution was, to the superficial observer, an aristocracy, because the sardars or

² Browne, India Tracts, Introduction.

the chiefs of the confederacies played such an important part ; but as Forster notes, popular power branched through many of its parts. The distinction accorded to the chiefs was a military necessity, a "self-preserving regard, nothing more."^{2a}

During the interval between these meetings of the Sarbat Khalsa, the Sikhs concerned in a particular transaction would all meet in an assembly, discuss it and then finally decide. These local gatherings were not always very orderly. The reports of such meetings held to decide very important questions of foreign policy are here quoted from two contemporary records.

If any messenger from any other power went to them for negotiation, the Sardars had not the power to negotiate independently. At first they spread mattresses in a particular place. All the Sikhs with their Sardars sat there—one was asked to make *Ardasa* (prayer). He stood up, announced the coming of the envoy of a particular Amir to make peace with Khalsaji. It was for the Khalsa to announce its resolution. Those who had assembled would give their opinion—one would declare

^{2a} Forster, *Travels*, I, p. 285.

in favour of fighting, he was opposed to making peace. Another would perhaps say that he would go away in another direction next day ; some would begin to abuse. But what the Sardars wanted, they spoke secretly into the ears of the ambassador. " Everyone is independent in his own position. Even if he has two horses and one village he would not bow down to anybody." ³

" Jowahir Singh went to interview the Sikhs at Barari Ghat. They hindered the rider of the elephant, ridden by Jowahir Singh, from coming to the assembly of interview. More than a hundred Sardars, as arranged, came and interviewed him. The sitting of the conference took place in this manner :—

For their information after saying the *Ardasa* the chanter cried out ' Jowahir Singh, the son of Suraj Mal, has come within the shelter of Khalsa Jiu and become a Sikh of Nanak. He is demanding redress for his father's blood.' This behaviour was disliked by Jowahir Singh. They also drove out the huqqa-bearer of Jowahir

³ Hakikat, pp. 38, 39.

Singh with insult and abuse. But he was in the utmost need and bore all this.”⁴

We thus find the Sikh constitution apparently exposed to all the defects of direct democracy. For all practical purposes, however, whether in the *Sarbat Khalsa* for national concerns or in the local gatherings of the Khalsa for local affairs the few Sardars really decided matters. But the ordinary Sikh horseman had never any galling sensation that in public matters he had no say. His power to intervene in a debate and push forward his own views was always there. His freedom of speech was unrestrained. Naturally, he could never sink in his own estimation and a real democratic element was there in the constitution. In its actual working it was an aristocracy, but in its spirit it was undoubtedly a democracy.

The central government of the Sikh confederation, as is the case generally with this form of government was very weak, in spite of its theocratic character. The *misl*s were the component parts of the confederation. Every *misl* was, to all intents and purposes, independent. These

⁴ Nuruddin, p. 83a.

misl possibly originated in a very natural way. The individuals joined the ranks of a chief or a Sardar, whom they considered deserving of leadership on the grounds of valour, experience, wealth and birth. The booty was divided in proportion to the contribution of each group of horsemen, of course the chief's portion being first divided off. There was again further sub-division among the individuals composing each group. Each held his portion in absolute independence. There was no obligation except for common purposes. Slowly and steadily however, the powers of the Sardars increased, their territories were extended, strong forts were built, their fighting strength increased and ultimately they emerged as twelve very powerful feudal chiefs of misls.

We should not lose sight of the fact that the feudalism of the Sikhs was very different not only from the feudalism of medieval Europe but also from the feudalism obtaining nearer home, in Rajputana. The misls were the confederacies of equals. A Sikh disdained to acknowledge any earthly superior. The Sardar was no doubt obeyed, but there "was no obligation to obey beyond what they might consider to be for their

own reciprocal benefit or for the well-being of the misl." This was undoubtedly the state of things in the beginning. There were, however, at no stage of Sikh feudal history, a haughty noblesse as in Rajputana or in medieval Europe. In Rajputana the chiefs were divided into distinct grades, which showed a highly artificial state. Mediaeval feudal Europe also presents the picture of a graded society. Then again in Rajputana there was a patriarchal element, the greater number of vassal chiefs claiming affinity in blood to the sovereign. There was no such patriarchal element in Sikh feudalism, nor do we hear of an elaborate list of feudal obligations as in mediaeval Europe. There was of course the obligation of military service. The feudal system of Europe has been described, by Gibbon, as the offspring of chance and barbarism. The Punjab system was not certainly feudal in the European sense. The all-pervading sense of brotherhood and a superadded theocratic outlook would not, at least in theory, allow distinctions of rank.

The Sikh system thus differed in essentials from others to which it had a superficial likeness and its distinctive characteristics were all its own.

These misls remind us of the Ayudhajibin sanghas of the Hindu period, mentioned by Panini and confirmed by Kautilya, as also by Greek writers. The writer of the Arthasastra, however, describes them as "Sastropajibins." The Malavas and the Kshudrakas are mentioned by the Greek writers in this connection and the Indian writers mention the names of the following :⁵

1. The Vrika.
2. The Damani and others.
3. The Trigartta—Six Trigarttas
 - (a) The Kaundoparatta.
 - (b) The Dandaki.
 - (c) The Kaushtaki ?
 - (d) The Jalamani.
 - (e) The Brahmagupta.
 - (f) The Janaki.
4. The Yaudheyas and others.
5. The Parsva and others.

These communities "considered military art as the vital principle of their constitution." These military republics were in the "Vahika country" interpreted by K. P. Jayaswal as "the country of the rivers, comprising the Sind valley and the

⁵ Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 32.

Punjab." Thus, we find that the misls or the military confederacies of the Sikhs had their prototypes even in the early Hindu period. The peculiar geography of the Punjab, intersected by so many mighty streams and its position as a frontier territory may have combined to bring repeatedly into existence these military associations in almost all periods of Indian history, in the early Hindu period no less than in the Muhammadan or early British period.

It is not possible for us to understand fully the economic condition of the Punjab in the eighteenth century under Sikh rule, unless we take into consideration the desolation and the misery caused by the Persian and Afghan invasions between 1739-'67. There is a saying still familiar in the Punjab : " What we eat and drink is ours, the rest is Ahmad Shah's." ⁶ It well illustrates how much ruin these repeated plundering raids caused to the country. They did, too, a great injury to this sorely harassed province, by imparting to its population a restless and inconstant character. To induce such a people to settle down to peaceful

⁶ Gazetteer, Gujrat District.

avocations was the greatest and the most difficult task that the Sikh chieftains had to face. But on the testimony of disinterested foreigners, we are entitled to say that the Sikh chiefs acquitted themselves much better than we could possibly expect of them. Francklin notes: "The Sikh territories are said to contain prodigious quantities of cattle, horses, oxen, cows and sheep; and grain of various kinds is produced in abundance. The precious metals are very scarce and their trade is for that reason chiefly carried on by barter." ⁷

"Though fond of plunder, the Sikhs in the interior parts of the country preserve good order and a regular government and the cultivation of their lands is attended with much assiduity. Their revenues are collected at two stated periods of six months each." ⁸

Browne is equally enthusiastic in his praise. He writes: "The country is said to be in a state of high cultivation, which I believe because they carry into it all the cattle fit for tillage which come into their possession by

⁷ Francklin, *Shah Alam*, p. 73.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

plunder, collect a very moderate rent and that mostly in kind and during any intestine disputes, their soldiery never molest the husbandman.”⁹

In the collection of revenue in the Punjab it is stated to be a general rule that the chiefs, to whom the territory belongs, should receive one-half of the produce and the farmer, the other. But the chief never levies the whole of his share; and in no country, perhaps, is the ryot or cultivator treated with more indulgence.”¹⁰

Of some Sikh Sardars who were reputed fighters we may have an impression that they knew nothing of the arts of peace. But many of them like Sardars Gujar Singh and Sahib Singh, were ideal chiefs in this respect. “The names of Sardars Gujar Singh and Sahib Singh are often in the mouths of the people, who look back to their

⁹ Browne, *India Tracts*, Introduction.

¹⁰ Malcolm, *Sketch*, p. 126.

¹¹ *Siyar* IV, p. 8. “But then they are no more those barbarians we have heard of. Sensible of the advantages of good government they have put themselves upon the footing of using the husbandman and the farmer with the utmost regard and tenderness; so that those countries are now in the highest degree of culture and population.”

rule without the smallest bitterness. They seem indeed to have followed an enlightened liberal policy, sparing no effort to induce the people harassed by twenty years of constant spoliation to settle down to peaceful occupation.”¹²

The revival of agriculture was less difficult than the revival of trade and commerce. The great sense of insecurity that prevailed, was responsible for the fact that the merchants and traders had deserted the main Punjab route. They did some business, however, by the mountain route, and Jammu as the “Dar-ul-Aman” or the “Abode of peace” profited at the expense of the lower region. Moreover, even after the establishment of some sort of order, the presence of so many chiefs, each with a right to levy a toll on merchandise was not certainly conducive to the revival of trade and commerce. “The Sikh chiefs, however, discovered the injury which their interests have suffered from this cause, and have endeavoured and not without success, to restore confidence to the merchant ; and a great part of the shawl trade now flows through the cities of Lahore, Amritsar,

¹² Punjab Gazetteer, Gujrat District.

Patiala to Hindustan.”¹³ Those foreign merchants who settled in the Punjab were accorded protection but foreign traders on their way to other countries were pretty often plundered.”¹⁴

The exports and imports of the Punjab under the rule of the misls are given below :—

Exports.	Imports.
Countries west of Attock :	
Sugar, rice, wheat, white cloth.	Swords, horses, fruit, lead, spices.
Kashmir :	
Nearly the same	Shawls, variety of cloths, saffron, fruit.
Hill regions :	
Matchlocks and horses	Iron and other inferior commodities.
Deccan :	
Horses, camels, sugar, rice, white cloth, matchlocks, swords, bows, arrows.	Sulphur, indigo, salt, lead, iron, coarse broad cloth, spices.
Bikanir :	
Do.	Coarse and fine rice, sugar, opium and indigo.
Jodhpur :	
Salt from the Sambar Lake.	

¹³ Malcolm, Sketch, p. 126.

¹⁴ Forster, I, p. 293.

Omichand was a Sikh merchant. There were many such in Bengal and Bihar.

There was no fixed route but everything depended upon the nature of the chiefs in whose territories the trade routes lay. "The most important trade routes generally converged from Amritsar by way of Macchhiwara ; in the Cis-Sutlej region *via* Hansi Rangeghur, Oricha into west Rajputana and *via* Kythal, Jind, Karnal into Rajputana." ¹⁵

In the Punjab there were four kinds of land tenure :—

(1) Pattidari—referred to the holding of every associate of the Sardar who equipped and mounted himself—the tenure could not be sold but could be mortgaged—reciprocal aid for mutual protection and defence, was the only tie that bound the Sardar and the Pattidar.

(2) Misldari—referred to the allotment to outsiders as the free reward for co-operation. They were free to transfer themselves with their possessions to another misl.

(3) Tabadari—referred to a retainer, a tenant-at-will.

(4) Jagir—referred to the allotments made by the Sardars out of his own portion to his relatives

rapidity of their marching is incredible.”¹⁸ Some of the Sikhs also used bows and arrows. The inlaying of fire arms was their only luxury. Colonel Polier, writing twenty years before George Thomas, gives an almost identical description. He says that “their horses were so well trained that they would stop from a full career.”

It is apparent that the Sikh tactics was to wear out the enemy, to draw him into the snare by trick fights and then to overwhelm him. In a pitched battle against a determined adversary, it was not possible for them to succeed. Moreover, in pitched battles, they were very much handicapped by the absence of good artillery. Their system, though unsuited to close combats and concentrated attacks, placed them at a great advantage strategically, because their swift cavalry could command the communications. The extensive forests and the hill tracts provided safe lines of retreat ; and as they were not a race of epicures, it was not difficult for them to provide themselves with their coarse fare even in hills and forests.

¹⁸ Francklin, Military Memoirs of George Thomas, pp. 71, 72.

became the all-important factors. Concord became conspicuous by its absence. The central government practically ceased to function. The sense of brotherhood did not disappear altogether. Other institutions were there to remind the Sikhs of their fraternity. But in a political sense it ceased to be operative.

A struggle for supremacy began in the seventies, as it was bound to. The chiefs degenerated from self-sacrificing fighters for the national cause into self-seeking freebooting barons. We can well illustrate our point with the help of science. If we place an iron bar in a coil and electrize that coil the iron bar becomes magnetic. But when the electricity is gone, the magnetism also goes with it. The impulse given by Guru Gobind Singh and the presence of the foreign danger had given the Sikhs a much-needed electric current and the political sense of brotherhood had become magnetic. When that was gone, its magnetism disappeared and the Sikhs fell to wrangling among themselves. Feudalism everywhere makes for chaos and anarchy and Sikh history is no exception. In the mutual struggle for ascendancy the Sukerchakia misl prevailed, but the separatist

tendency of the Cis-Sutlej Sikhs triumphed with the help of a foreign power. "Theocratic confederate feudalism, gave place to a military monarchy."

In all political organisations an element of decay is always at work. Power brings an appetite for more power and in this unmitigated lust for power there is the seed of corruption. Monarchy degenerates into tyranny, aristocracy stiffens into oligarchy, democracy leads to anarchy. It was impossible to reform or revitalize the complex organism that has been described as "theocratic confederate feudalism." It was already a decayed institution in 1768 and it went on decaying from day to day.

Even in 1783-'84, shrewd observers could visualise the prospect of one man rule coming. Forster wrote in 1783: " . . . we may see some ambitious chief led on by his genius and success, and, absorbing the power of his associates, display from the ruins of their commonwealth, the standard of monarchy." Warren Hastings wrote in 1784: " . . . A constitution so framed, may subsist unchanged for a length of time, while it has no powerful neighbours to invade it and while it

remains confined within the limits of its native territory. But when it aims at permanent conquest and carries the principles of its own construction into new establishments, it becomes liable to almost certain variation from whatever rules they adopt for the distribution of territory or the appropriation of revenue, because both must introduce a new species of property and add to the individual power which becomes possessed of it. In such a change of polity, should it so happen that one man of superior capacity and enterprise should acquire but a few degrees of power beyond his nearest competitors, it will be easy to trace in the primitive defects of such a government the gradual and easy means by which the whole might be enveloped within his own supremacy.”¹⁹

Sikh theocratic confederate feudalism had released living forces at one time. It had its triumphs, its grand achievements to its credit. But circumstances were now changed, and it was quite in the fitness of things that it now gave place to a strong military monarchy. Ranjit Singh absorbed most of the Trans-Sutlej misls or

¹⁹ Forster, Travels, I, p. 295.

made them dependent on himself, and it was his rise that gave the Sikhs half a century more of glorious political life until the collapse of their power at Sobraon. But this does not mean either that the misl constitution was hopelessly bad all through, or that in India all experiments in democracy ultimately lead to monarchy. All that these constitutional changes teach us can best be expressed in the language of Keyserling. "There is no such thing as a better or a worse form of government. There is only a form which is badly adapted or one which is better adapted to conditions as they are and good or bad applies only to the degree to which it gives form to these conditions and makes them productive of great achievements." ²⁰

Further, we must not come to any hasty conclusion or feel shocked to think of the Sikhs of the eighteenth century on account of their raids and their plunders. The corsairs and privateers, the "seabeggars" chartered by William of Orange to prey upon Spanish shipping, laid the foundations

²⁰ Forrest, Selections III, G. G's Minute, 4th December, 1784.

of Dutch maritime power. The buccaneers of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, Drake, Frobisher, Hawkins, Raleigh, laid the foundation of British naval power, and inspite of their career of plunder, they are now looked back upon as national heroes. The Sikh free booters of the period of independence occupied a similar rôle in the history of Sikh militarism. The Dal Khalsa and its heroes should not receive a sneer from us merely because they plundered. They also fought most effectively and were largely responsible for stemming the tide of Durrani invasions. We must not judge them according to an ideal code of ethics, but by the standard that prevailed in the 18th century. No respect for property rights could possibly develop in that turbulent period when there was no government that could govern and anybody who had the power had naturally the right to subvert others.

The part played by the Sikhs in the disappearance of the Duranni menace must not be minimised. Mahadji Sindhia was accustomed to declare that "even in his dreams, he still heard the lobbing paces of the Afghan pursuer's horse and the roar of his broken wind." The blind

Emperor Shah Alam wrote.....“ yet peradventure Timur Shah, my Kinsman, will come to my aid.” But, as has been shown in the foregoing pages, The prospects of the Durrani in North-Western India, were definitely shattered by the Sikhs. Keene puts it very aptly : “ A few incursions, each less successful than its predecessor ; the famous Khalsa was to settle down, like a wall of concrete, a dam against the encroachments of the northern flood.” What was almost equally important, the establishment of the power of the Sikhs in the Punjab, put an end to the peaceful immigration of adventurers from Persia and Turkestan, which had brought to the Mughal empire many of its great generals, able politicians and statesmen, the Arakan-i-Daulat or pillars of the state.”

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The sword would confer rights much more surely and effectively than musty parchments. Of course stories of their achievements were known ; old men would relate these to young men and in congregational gatherings the deeds of the old heroes were no doubt recited. In this way a traditional history of the Sikhs continued to exist though it was transformed, transmuted, added to or altered according to the sweet will of the reciter. Not until late in the nineteenth century were such traditions enshrined in books like the *Panth Prakash*, the *Suraj Prakash*, etc. Parochial patriotism, jingoism, under such circumstances, no doubt coloured events and even made victories of defeats. But a Sikh point of view of Sikh history, it is absolutely necessary to have. I have proceeded very cautiously and only accepted such traditions as are supported by contemporary records and are not incompatible with other known facts. In other words, I have attached only a very slight corroborative value of this source.

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MARATHI.

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Parasnis, Delhi Yethil Raj Karnen, 2 vols. Indispensable to the writer of the *Cis-Sutlej Sikh History* and the chronicler of Sikh incursions into the Upper Doab.

Rajwade, Vols. I and VI. The dates given here are not correct.

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